

LONDON ASSEMBLY

November 2025

Economy, Culture and Skills Committee

This document contains the written evidence received by the Committee in response to its Call for Evidence, which formed part of its investigation into the declining number of children in London.

Calls for Evidence are open to anyone to respond to. In September 2025 the Committee published a number of questions related to its investigation, which can be found on page two. The Call for Evidence was open from 18 September to 10 November 2025.

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Questions asked by the Committee

1. What are the reasons behind the reduction in the number of people raising children in London?
2. What impact is this demographic change having on public services in London, in particular schools, and what further impact could it have in the future?
3. Is this demographic change having any immediate impact on London's economy, and what impact could it have in the future?
4. Should the Mayor, central and local government take action to address this issue, and if so, how?

**The London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee
call for evidence: Declining Number of Children in London**

G15 Response

November 2025

About the G15

The G15 is made up of London's leading housing associations. The G15's members provide more than 880,000 homes across the country, including around one in ten homes for Londoners. The G15 represents the largest providers of new affordable homes in London and accounts for approximately 15% of all affordable homes built across England. Over the last few years, our members have funded and delivered more than 56,000 new homes in partnership with the Mayor of London. Delivering good quality safe homes for our residents is our number one priority. Last year our members invested almost £2bn in improvement works and repairs to people's homes, ensuring people can live well. Together, we are the largest providers of new affordable homes in London and a significant proportion of all affordable homes across England. It's what we were set up to do and what we're committed to achieving. We are independent, charitable organisations and all the money we make is reinvested in building more affordable homes and delivering services for our residents.

Find out more and see our latest updates on our website: www.g15.london

The G15 members are:

- A2Dominion
- Clarion Housing Group
- The Guinness Partnership
- Hyde
- L&Q
- MTVH
- Sovereign Network Group
- Notting Hill Genesis
- Peabody
- Riverside
- Southern Housing

For more information, please contact: G15@Peabody.org.uk

We provide homes to one in ten Londoners and are a significant provider of affordable housing, supporting families across both inner and outer London. By offering secure and genuinely affordable homes, we enable people from diverse backgrounds to live, work, and raise children in the capital.

The declining number of children in London is a serious concern for the city's future. We welcome the Assembly's inquiry and would like to highlight the role that housing plays in driving this trend.

London is home to nearly nine million people, yet only 22.7 per cent are under 18. The number of children living in the capital is declining rapidly, with significant implications for the future population, workforce, and community life.

The decline in the number of children living in London cannot be attributed solely to falling birth rates. The available evidence shows that inner London is being hollowed out, while outer London boroughs and neighbouring counties in the South East are absorbing families who are priced out of central areas. Over the last five years, nine of the ten boroughs recording the largest declines in primary pupil numbers are in inner London, with Westminster seeing the sharpest fall at 15.9 per cent. Other boroughs such as Lambeth, Southwark, Hackney, Camden, Hammersmith and Fulham, Islington, and Wandsworth have all seen reductions of between eight and fourteen per cent. In the past five years alone, Southwark, Hackney, and Islington have each lost up to six primary schools.

The movement of families out of the capital is also accelerating. Between 2012/13 and 2017/18, the proportion of primary pupils who left London by the end of primary school rose to 20 per cent - no comparable shift is seen elsewhere in England. London also records the lowest proportion of pupils moving in from other regions, with nearly five and a half times more pupils leaving London than arriving from elsewhere in the country.

This outward movement is placing significant pressure on outer London boroughs, where demand for school places, housing, and services is growing. Local authorities on the edges of the capital are struggling to accommodate this shift, with rising pupil numbers and increased pressure on already stretched family housing and local infrastructure. At the same time, inner London boroughs face severe funding pressures. As school budgets are tied to pupil numbers, when enrolment falls, schools receive less funding even though their fixed costs - such as staffing, utilities, and maintenance - remain largely the same. This financial strain forces schools to make difficult decisions to narrow the curriculum, reduce staff, or, in some cases, close altogether.

Housing affordability, supply, overcrowding, and security are central to the decline in London's child population. The median home in London now costs more than 11.5

times the median salary, compared with 7.6 times across England. The Office for National Statistics considers anything above five times income to be unaffordable. Private renters in London spend between 40 and 50 per cent of their income on rent, leaving little room for savings or the costs of raising children. Housing costs have consistently outpaced wages and welfare support, making London fundamentally unaffordable for many families who would otherwise choose to stay in the city.

Additionally, the proportion of people living in poverty in London rises sharply when housing costs are taken into account - from 15 per cent to 26 per cent. Three of the five local areas with the highest levels of deprivation related to housing and access to services are in London. This illustrates how housing pressures in the capital are contributing to deprivation and exacerbating inequality.

London also has the highest levels of overcrowding in England. Many families are raising children in homes that are too small, with little prospect of moving to a larger property. Research by one G15 member from 2022 indicates that families with one child in London are significantly more likely to experience overcrowding than those elsewhere in the country. They found that of the families with one child, 34% are overcrowded in London, compared to 12% outside the Capital. Often, there are additional adults in the household contributing to this overcrowding and is not simply families in one-bedroom flats.

Long waiting times for family-sized social housing and limited options in the private market make it difficult for growing families to find suitable space. The supply of three- and four-bedroom homes, particularly at affordable rent levels, remains far below need in both the social and private sectors. This lack of appropriate housing is likely to influence families leaving London or deciding against having more children.

The recent Renters' Rights Bill represents a positive step towards improving tenure security for private renters by introducing longer-term tenancy protections and ending no-fault evictions. However, for low-to-middle income households without access to significant financial support, greater security alone does not resolve the underlying issue of affordability. Too many families are still priced out of larger homes, even with more secure rental arrangements.

For those seeking to buy, current shared ownership products are not adequately designed for families on modest incomes. The G15's submission to the Home Ownership Inquiry highlighted the need for reform; namely reviewing the income threshold, enabling flexible staircasing, and exploring new products that support both long-term family goals as well as small starter flats for first-time buyers.

The decline in the number of children in London also reflects wider social and economic pressures on families. Rising cost of living, insecure employment, and expensive

childcare are combining to make family life increasingly unaffordable. The average age at which Londoners have their first child is now 32, and this is rising.

Policy recommendations for the GLA, local and central government:

- Increase the supply of affordable, family-sized social housing through a well-funded and flexible Social and Affordable Homes Programme (SAHP).**

The next SAHP should prioritise genuinely affordable three- and four-bedroom homes, with grant funding set per habitable room rather than per unit to encourage delivery of larger family homes. Funding allocations should also include provision for reformed shared ownership products.

- Reform shared ownership to meet the needs of low- and middle-income families.**

Current products are not accessible or affordable for many families. The model should be reviewed to ensure income thresholds reflect London's housing costs, especially where two individuals earning a key worker salary are looking to purchase together, and to allow for more flexible staircasing and lower initial deposits. Stamp Duty Land Tax rules should also be simplified, including for staircasing, to make the route clearer and more affordable.

- Maximise use of existing social housing.**

Social housing allocation policies should make full use of available stock and provide effective incentives for downsizing, freeing up larger homes for families in need. This should build on the recent work of the London Assembly Housing Committee on allocations and support a coordinated approach across boroughs – please see [our response](#) for further detail.

Reversing this trend requires coordinated action across national, regional, and local government. London faces a particularly acute and distinct set of housing challenges that cannot be addressed through one-size-fits-all national policy. Devolving greater powers and funding to the GLA would allow decisions on housing, planning, and infrastructure to be made closer to the communities they affect. Local leaders are best placed to design solutions that reflect London's housing pressures and deliver homes that meet local needs.

Without interventions, London risks becoming a city where people on modest incomes do not feel able to raise a family. This shift would weaken community stability, reduce the future workforce, and create a long-term imbalance in the city's social and economic fabric. Ensuring that London remains a place where families can put down roots requires a fundamental shift in housing provision - towards good quality, secure, affordable homes in communities that support family life.

**Submission to Economy, Culture and Skills Committee – Children in London
From a parent in an Inner London development (segregated play)**

Background

As a family we tried to do what London policy makers want families to do – we bought a flat in a ‘family friendly’ former school, new development in inner London with the intention of bringing up our children in a mixed tenure neighbourly community with outside space, close to a local school, nursery and our work places.

In March 2019 we were thrown into the media spotlight when the Guardian reported on our battle against segregated play areas on our housing development in Lambeth.¹ This media attention led to a change in the London Plan which stipulated that play areas should not be segregated by Tenure.²

Six years on from the story, there are only two families left in the private apartments on the development (my family and one other) which is made up of over 80 properties (149 including social housing) – all of the other families have sold up and moved out of Lambeth. No new families have moved in. The families involved with the segregated play story on the social housing side have also moved out. There are however some families living in the social housing part of the development although there is no mixing between the communities on the development – but we do meet at school, the street and the local park where we all feel more welcome to congregate.

The development is now entirely made up of pied a terres, short term lets or sharing young professionals. It has no sense of neighbourhood or community as it is a very transient place where people come and go. It is **an example of how not to build or develop a family friendly community if you would like to encourage families to live and remain in inner London.**

Because of my publicised experience on my development I have been contacted by other families suffering the same way across London estates and developments for example the parents of the [Acton Gardens estate in West London](#).³ However, unlike the parents of Acton Gardens and me, they are unable to speak out either because they are scared of losing their tenancy or due to a fear of a backlash and further ostracization from their neighbours towards their family. The recent Play Commission led by former

¹ [Too poor to play: children in social housing blocked from communal playground | Cities | The Guardian](#)
['Why can't they come and play?': housing segregation in London | Cities | The Guardian](#)
['Outrageous' and 'disgusting': segregated playground sparks fury | Cities | The Guardian](#)
['Don't make this rich v poor': the mothers who won the right for their kids to play together | Cities | The Guardian](#)

² [London officials ban segregated play areas in future housing developments | Cities | The Guardian](#)

³ [Raising The Nation — A commission on play](#) see page 60

Children's Commissioner Anne Longfield refers to this as a "growing culture of hostility towards play".⁴

Summary

This submission is in four parts. The first three sections intend to highlight the compounded problem that families wanting to live in inner London face: badly designed and managed developments for families; an inability to extend apartments to fit growing families; and the lack of priority given to providing playgrounds for children in inner London (a necessity for families with no outside space of their own) through the example of our local park. The final section provides reasons why against the odds we are still trying to live in inner London:

1. the planning, design and management problems of the development which has meant that families have moved away and why new families do not want to move in here. I provide a detailed set of recommendations on this subject for London councils and the GLA on how they can overcome many of the problems we have faced and therefore retain families in housing developments in inner London (as well as posing questions to London Councils for them to consider);
2. the problems which we as a family are facing in trying to extend our apartment to accommodate our expanding family- so we do not have to consider moving out of inner London for more space;
3. the difficulties in having a promised playground built in a local Lambeth Park which is surrounded by tower blocks with no balconies – it took 10 years; and finally
4. why we want to stay in inner London – the benefits of living here for families with children.

Problems:

This is a summary of the problems we have encountered which other families no doubt also experience:

- The failure in design and planning of modern London apartment developments for real family life;
- Contradictory sales material for new developments setting up conflict before residents have moved in – promising opposing lifestyles such as play areas for children but also peace and tranquillity in the city for those without children (examples provided in annex 1);
- The mismanagement of developments to the detriment of families by making them feel unwelcome - for example: complaints and letters sent to parents if children play outside; rules created aimed only at families with children; and

⁴ [Raising The Nation — A commission on play](#) pg 10 Executive Summary

unwelcoming signage such as ‘no ball games’, ‘children should be supervised at all times’ etc (examples provided in annex 2, 4, 7 and 12); See Play Commission finding that “In London alone there are over 7,000 signs limiting play and movement for many of the 560,000 children in the capital. As well as signs, neighbours and community groups’ noise and disruption complaints always seem to outweigh children’s right to play.”⁵

- An inability to extend properties in apartment blocks as families grow in size due to: the need for a full planning application as opposed to a householder planning application (meaning need for bio diversity net gain assessment, sign off by London Fire Brigade etc), planning times (with Lambeth currently 10 months with no decision); excessive payments demanded by freeholders to give permission/ cost of air space (£100k); and fire brigade current interpretation of Part B of approved document of building regulations (requiring retrospective sprinkler system throughout ALL apartments).
- Lack of larger affordable local properties to move on to up the housing ladder – the price difference between a 2/3 bedroom flat £7-900k approx. to a 4 bedroom house £1.5 -£2 million + is impossible to jump to;
- Crippling service charges – our service charge for our apartment is now £600 a month and this is on top of gas, electricity, insurance and mortgage. This is for a basic development with no fancy extras such as gym, pool or cinema that some inner London new developments have. It is just for the building and grounds maintenance, a lift and a caretaker. It would be more affordable to move out of inner London to a freehold house with no service charge.
- The lack of priority given by councils to parks and playgrounds which are a lifeline for families with no outside space of their own in inner London (1 in 5 families)⁶. It seems to take a huge amount of time for councils to build or renovate this much needed play spaces and as a result parks become unwelcoming for children (only used by dogs and dog owners to the detriment of children (fear, dog damage, dog faeces etc). See Play Commission’s findings that “Over 400 playgrounds closed across England in the decade to 2022, while the collective annual park budgets for England fell by more than £350 million between 2011 and 2023.”⁷ And yet as the Government announced on 2 November :

⁵ [Raising The Nation — A commission on play](#) pg 10 Executive Summary

⁶ Office for National Statistics, [One in eight British households has no garden](#), May 2020

⁷ [Raising The Nation — A commission on play](#) pg 10 Executive Summary

“94% of parents say their children enjoy physical play as a form of movement - with top activities including visiting the playground (56%), riding a bike (46%), dancing (44%) and playing tag or chase (43%).”⁸

Recommendations:

This is a summary of recommendations based on our experience. The Committee may want to consider these to help try to encourage families to live and remain in inner London:

- A form of London wide kite mark scheme to indicate a ‘family friendly’ development where children and family needs will be put first by management companies and councils. For example: there would be no outside ‘play bans’; no anti play signage; and there would be tolerance of the sight and sound of children playing. Complaints about children playing would be managed fairly putting children’s rights to play first above other resident’s right to peace and quiet at all hours;
- Better awareness by designers and planners of the noise funnel created in internal courtyards which is the cause of many complaints about children playing outside;
- Families should be encouraged to move into new developments first to establish a presence, so they are then not treated as ‘noisy invaders’ to those already living in the development;
- The GLA may want to consider recommending what other European cities such as Berlin, Milan, Barcelona and Amsterdam have done and no longer consider complaints about the noise of children playing as complaints. See articles in footnote⁹:
- Make it easier for families to make changes and extend their apartments as they grow in size so they do not have to move out of inner London eg: family apartments to be considered under householder planning application instead of a full planning application; and the setting of a maximum ‘fee’ that freeholders can charge families for changes to their homes.

⁸ [Nearly three in five parents expect children’s physical activity to drop this winter as stars back new campaign to keep kids active - GOV.UK](#)

⁹ [Cataluña blinda el ruido de los patios de las escuelas: “Son niños, no coches” | Noticias de Cataluña | EL PAÍS](#)

[BBC News - Noisy children no longer verboten in Berlin](#)

[Giochi in cortile? Milano vieta di vietare la libertà ai bambini](#)

["I bimbi possono giocare in cortile": a Bologna è una norma del nuovo Regolamento edilizio Amsterdam: sound of children playing not a valid reason for complaint, say experts | Netherlands | The Guardian](#)

- Control of service charges so families are not forced to move due to spiralling costs in apartment blocks – it's a lot harder for 2 parents with 3 children in an apartment to afford then 3 or more sharing professionals in the equivalent size apartment; and
- Parks and playgrounds to be given more attention by Councils as a way of attracting and keeping families in inner London for example: parks and playgrounds should be seen as critical infrastructure not as a 'nice to have' optional extra; and a play sufficiency duty could be introduced in London as it has in Wales and Scotland. See [Play England's website for an explanation](#)

1. Planning and development management issues

The development more than **met the target area for play space in the London Plan** and yet **a child is very rarely seen outside playing**. The Sunday Times wrote about this in April 2023: [The hidden war on children's play spaces in cities](#). There are several reasons for this development failing children which could equally happen at other London developments:

1. The design and access statement promises that the courtyard garden can be used for '**quiet relaxation and contemplation**' in addition to being the **designated play areas**.

"Our aim is to create an intimate space full of character, with the opportunity for quieter reflection or for children to explore".

These two activities are in direct contradiction of each other and if the development is an example it will be the children who lose out in any complaints by residents about these competing functions ie noise and untidiness vs quiet and manicured. (See Annex 2 letter from the management company to residents and annex 4 a selection of messages from residents in a google group.)

- *How can London councils manage the conflicting uses of communal outside spaces so that children's requirements for play do not lose out to adult's needs for quiet contemplation as they have done at the development?*

2. '**Landscape and play strategies**' Unfortunately, at the development neither strategy was implemented. As soon as the plans for the development were granted permission from Lambeth Council the landscape and play strategy architect was dismissed by the developer along with the well thought out plans.

As a result of the play strategy not being implemented, none of the ecological play areas where children could engage with nature such as bug hotels were built, areas which were meant to be built for children's enjoyment such as water play areas were deemed 'unsafe' and what was built for 'play' was highly unsuitable and of a very poor quality so consequently is never used.

(See annex 1 the advertising vs the reality, annex 2 the letter from the management company, annex 3 emails from the developer, annex 6 email from the landscape architect, annex 5 email from Lambeth planning and annex 9/10 landscape and play strategies.)

- *How can London councils ensure that landscape and play strategy architects will be retained and that the plans will be fully implemented,*

with quality play spaces, when this did not happen at the development and Lambeth has been unable to enforce the strategies?

3. The **play strategy** at the [development] had an emphasis on play being carried out through all open spaces and courtyards on the development. However, this has been prevented in two ways by adult residents/management company/developers:

- It was deemed that children playing was too noisy and should be contained within the designated fenced in play areas - away from the main courtyards as sound was found to 'funnel up into apartments' where adult residents decided that their ability to hear their tv with their windows open or work from home in quiet was more important.
- Play in the water feature (part of the play strategy) was deemed too dangerous, as was play after dusk (ie after school in the winter months), play involving climbing fences, play near the raised allotment beds, play involving bikes, scooters, balls etc. Concerns over 'health and safety' 'insurance liabilities' and 'damage to plants' were and are still used as justification although no risk assessment has ever been produced by the management company nor have any insurance company requirements asking for this.

(See annex 1 the advertising vs the reality, annex 2 the letter from the management company, annex 3 emails from the developer, annex 4 resident google group complaints, annex 6 email from the landscape architect, annex 5 email from Lambeth planning, annex 9/10 landscape and play strategies and annex 12 the Good Neighbour guide.)

- *How can London councils ensure that the voices of wealthy and powerful adults – and those with more time on their hands to make complaints and to form and participate in Resident Tenant Associations – will not overrule the needs and rights of children to play freely in the outside spaces including normal childhood behaviour such as being able to laugh, shout and cry?*
- *How can London councils prevent concerns over 'Health and Safety', 'insurance liabilities' and 'damage to plants' from being used as a way of preventing children from accessing and carrying out play as it has been at the development? What exactly are the insurance company requirements when it comes to outside play on housing estates?*

At the [development] the **raised allotment beds** for the private housing and for the social housing are in different parts of the development so children who go to school together are unable to garden together at home. The raised allotment beds are also too high for younger children to access. The social housing allotment beds are out by the

street and open to anyone. As a result of these factors no children use the raised allotment beds to grow and learn about food and plants.

- *How can London Councils ensure that allotment beds are all built accessibly together and that families in the social housing get equal access to use them as to those living in the private housing?*

4. Access arrangements to the communal areas and play spaces:

- The original plans for development had gates from private gardens on to communal spaces as well as open thoroughfares from social housing to the communal spaces. However, the developers did not build the gates or thoroughfares but instead, walls, fences and hedges were erected and, from what I understand, Lambeth gave retrospective planning permission without considering the effects on community life at the development.
- Without direct access from the private gardens surrounding the communal gardens children have to go through a number of obstacles to access their friends and play spaces – requiring fobs (costing ££s), keys, walking along the external street, potentially interacting with other adults etc. This makes play spaces and communal spaces not only inaccessible to children but particularly inaccessible to those residents with **disabilities**.
- Those from social housing in wheelchairs and with any upper body weakness cannot access the communal grounds in the development even from their ground floor terraces that look out over the space. The dividing wall ([as seen on the BBC news](#)) has been replaced with a very heavy gate and a code function which is updated and residents are not informed about.
- Direct access from ground floor gardens where wheelchair users live has not been re-established. It would seem the requirement for the submission and approval of access arrangements was never formally discharged with the development.
- Children are unable to climb their fences and hedges to access the play areas as they have been filmed by contractors/other residents for ‘damaging hedges’ which they have been charged for. Health and safety rules have been used by the management company to stop fences being climbed.

The Mayor’s own Good Design guidance states:

“Residential building management should ensure that children and young people are able to move between private, communal and public spaces (from the home to the street) without relying on adult presence.”

- Another failure of the access arrangements at the development is that social housing tenants cannot enter the development through the private housing side on [street name removed] as they have not been given fob access. Private owners can enter and leave through either the private side on [street

[name removed] or the social housing side on *[street name removed]*. This creates a sense of division and ‘unfairness’. There should be every attempt in London to prevent this form of ‘poor door’ access fob arrangement and ‘privileged access’.

- *How can London councils ensure that if plans are changed by the developer that it will not become harder for children and those with disabilities to access communal outside areas - when Lambeth failed to recognise or act on this at the development? Is there a process that is used to check on the impact on residents' daily lives of any changes to plans by developers?*
- *Can London councils ensure that there is equal access for everyone living on developments to all routes and communal areas so that there is no sense of unfairness and division? For example gardens or car parks. Service charges should NOT be an excuse when the resulting impact on a community is so damaging creating haves and have nots amongst neighbours.*

5. Signs have appeared at development which say “Children must play under the **supervision of adults**” (see annex 7) and I have been told by the management company in an email that children in the grounds should be supervised at all times (they also does not specify what age they consider a child so this could mean anyone up to the age of 18 as the UN recognised definition of a child). This is in direct contradiction to London’s Joanne McCartney, AM, Deputy Mayor for Education & Childcare, and Jules Pipe, Deputy Mayor for Planning, Regeneration & Skills who wrote in the forward to the Mayor’s own [Good Growth guide to “Making London Child Friendly”](#):

“Independent mobility is vital for the physical, social and mental development and health of young Londoners. It is also intrinsically connected to equality and the everyday freedoms they have to access and occupy public space.”

The guide goes on to explain:

“The independent mobility of children and young people is the freedom they have to occupy and move around the public realm without adult supervision.”

- *How can London councils ensure that children are able to play independently and without the need or requirement for supervision in and around their own estates and developments in line with the Mayor’s own guidance?*

6. My final concern is the **absence of family sized dwellings in the private and shared ownership blocks** in many new developments. Both shared ownership and private flats are often mostly 1 and 2 bed. This seems to set up a problem

from the outset of the needs of the different parts of the development being potentially in opposition. Families and single professionals may want entirely different outcomes from their housing and communal spaces.

As experienced in the development, families tend to want a sense of home, community and outside play with opportunities to get together and socialise with each other – this naturally incurs noise and untidiness - whereas those living in the one and two bed apartments tend to want peace, quiet and privacy to relax and to work, overlooking manicured, empty green spaces or to maintain the value of their ‘investment’.

This has produced conflict and a breakdown in community life on the development. It was only by the friendships between the private owner families and the social housing families coming together that the issue of segregated play and communal spaces was ever exposed and even now six years on this union is still not enough to protect the rights of children on the development to play freely outside together.

(see annex 4 a selection of resident google group comments)

- *How can London councils manage the competing needs of families with homes on estates and developments with those in the smaller expensive private/investment properties?*
- *Does mixed housing development sizes work or should some developments be specifically 3 bedroom plus aimed solely at families to prevent the risk of conflict?*

Detailed Recommendations on planning and development management:

- As part of Planning conditions there should be a very **clear ongoing management plan** to protect children’s rights to communal spaces. It should establish how conflicts (such as those which have developed at the development) are managed at other new London housing development so that children do not lose out on playing out freedom. Play and child presence on a housing development should NOT be treated as a form of anti-social behaviour to be curtailed by letters to residents and ‘rules’ asking for ‘quiet at weekends’ ‘no more than 6 people together’ etc as have been sent out to residents of the [development] (see annex 12 Good neighbour guide). The importance of good management has been recognised in the Mayor’s *‘Making London Child Friendly’* guidance:

“Children have a right to be present and visible in public, shared and communal spaces, and their movement and play should always be regarded as a legitimate activity. Expectations that children should not be seen or heard, or that they are limited to

certain areas supports the notion that spaces can be segregated or children's mobility constricted."

"The way that spaces and developments are managed has a critical impact on how they are used by children and young people, determining whether independent mobility is hindered or facilitated. Management is a key lens to understand and address how designs can be sustained and supported as part of a long-term plan through custodianship and maintenance. Without appropriate management, even the best designed spaces will fail their users."

- In housing developments and estates there should be a proactive encouragement towards children being in the communal spaces. Instead of rules and signs about what they 'can't do' or that children should be 'quiet' or 'supervised' or 'not damage plants' or 'no ball games' there should be **positive statements and signs** about **what they can do** for example "Play here", "Garden here", "make a mud pie here", "come find the worms and bugs", "Jump and run here", "Children and fun welcome". There has already been a failing with this not only at the development but also more recently and extremely disappointingly at other new developments such as the Nine Elms development shared between Lambeth and Wandsworth (as any of the signage at the development shows). As the Mayor's guidance states:

Children and young people should be given time and permission to play in streets, public spaces and shared and communal spaces in residential areas where appropriate. Children and young people are affected by adult behaviours in the environment, so adults must actively support and enable independent mobility and play in everyday contexts.

- **Families should be moved on to new developments first.** At the development the private flats surrounding the water play areas moved in nearly a year before the family and social housing blocks – establishing an expectation of a mausoleum like, manicured, quiet 'investment sales brochure' style environment as opposed to a community and home environment. There was a sense that families were not welcome but 'trespassing' in the now quiet inner sanctuary of the courtyards. This was not helped by the main swing play area being built in a courtyard over a year after the whole development was inhabited. Families' noise and untidiness should be able to establish themselves before those who are investing, rather than living in the properties, in the development dominate.
- If a **Resident Tenant Association** is formed on a housing development or estate it should be open for all residents to join - not just the private owners. It should be inclusive and representative off all including families and children. There

should be no assertion of a particularly vocal intolerant individual or individuals over the community as a whole. This was also recognised in the Mayor's '*Making London Child Friendly*' guidance:

- Management plans should be developed early in residential and mixed-use schemes, particularly in mixed-tenure developments, to ensure that all children and young people have access to the same public spaces for movement, play and socialising.
- A shared residential agreement protecting the rights of children and young people to play and freely socialise should be drawn up at the earliest stage for tenants and homeowners in residential developments.

I conclude this section with the words of the Mayor's Good Growth by Design programme *Making London Child Friendly*:

"we must move away from an approach that is just about 'play provision' and embrace the potential of London's urban environment to plan and design spaces that put children and young people first."

I hope this will be applied in both old and new developments across London. As Tim Gill the independent scholar and global advocate for children's play and mobility says based on the words of Enrique Peñalosa, the pioneering urbanist and former mayor of Bogota:

"Children are an indicator species for cities. The visible presence of children and youth of different ages and backgrounds, with and without their parents, in numbers, is a sign of the health of human habitats. Just as the presence of salmon in a river is a sign of the health of that habitat."

The development totally fails this test – the only children ever seen out are a metal statue as highlighted in this article in the Daily Mail: [Children in social housing flats banned from play area set aside for 'rich' neighbours | Daily Mail Online](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-5383333/Children-social-housing-flats-banned-play-area-set-aside-rich-neighbours-Daily-Mail-Online.html)



2. Attempts to extend our apartment to make space for a growing family

I note the latest Government [Healthy Homes Standard](#) published in October 2025 that:

Accessibility and future-proofing are also fundamental principles of a healthy home. Residents should be able to adapt their home to meet the current and future needs of their household, ensuring that people of all ages and abilities can live comfortably and safely.

- *How can councils make this work in London when the only new homes/developments in inner London are leasehold apartment based?*

This seems to be a fundamental problem in keeping families in inner London if homes in apartments cannot expand to meet family needs - when moving up the housing ladder into a house is financially unviable. We have tried to explore what we need to do to adapt our home for our family so we do not have to move out of inner London for more space.

When we moved to our apartment we had 1 child, we now have 3 children.

We live on the top floor of a 3-storey block so we have explored the idea of extending upwards to create another bedroom.

Problems we have encountered:

- Our Freeholder initially demanded £100k for the airspace above us – there seems to be no regulations or legislation to prevent landlords from attempting to make excessive profit from leaseholders trying to expand their properties;
- A prolonged planning application process as changes to apartments requires a full planning application not a householder planning application – we put our plans into Lambeth planning department in January 2025. This month the date for a decision has been extended again until November 2025;
- Because it is a full planning application the London Fire Brigade have to be consulted. We have since found out that we are likely to get approval from building control of a fire engineered solution but because of the number of cases the London fire brigade is having to look at it is giving a blanket no and not looking at individual solutions. It is not allowing any air space development without the whole building being retrofitted with sprinklers which makes the cost prohibitive for individual families.

3. Attempts to have children's playgrounds built or replaced

The development is on the edge of [estate name removed]. Our nearest park is [park name removed]. There are 6 x 18 storey (approx.) tower blocks close by, 3 of which have no balconies or private outside space.

NHS guidance recommends that children get at least 60 minutes of physical activity each day – including 30 minutes outside of school hours.¹⁰ Children spend 85% of their waking hours away from the school environment.¹¹ More than half of children in England are not getting the recommended amount of movement.¹² A recent Government survey has found that:

94% of parents say their children enjoy physical play as a form of movement - with top activities including visiting the playground (56%), riding a bike (46%), and playing tag or chase (43%).

The easiest activity to fit into the day, outside of school, was playing outside (41%).¹³

In 2015 a playground was agreed by Lambeth Council for Lambeth Walk Doorstep Green for the over 6 years age group. It was finally built and opened in May 2025. For the overs 6s in this area, there had been no allocated green play space on their doorstep until now. (Please see Annex 11 Lambeth Council's open spaces document about the park from 2019).

Meanwhile in January 2021, during the covid Lockdown, Lambeth council took away the only play area in the park – which was for the under 6s. This still has not been replaced nearly 5 years later. My daughter was one years old when it was removed, she will be 6 years old this January so when Lambeth Council do finally replace the under 6s playground she will no longer be the age it is aimed at. Although 5 years may not seem a long time in council budget or in planning terms it is a long time in a child's life. For my daughter's generation there has been no play equipment in the local park for their time as under 6s. (see Annex 8 photo of play equipment removal notice) When the swing broke when my 10 year old was under 6 years old – it took 3 years for the council to mend it.

The Play Commission led by Anne Longfield, former children's commissioner for England found that “

¹⁰ [Children's activity levels remain stable but significant and sustained action required | Sport England](#)

¹¹ [Statutory guidance for local authorities on services to improve young people's well-being - GOV.UK](#)

¹² Sport England, [Children's activity levels hold firm but significant challenges remain](#), 7 December 2023

¹³ [Nearly three in five parents expect children's physical activity to drop this winter as stars back new campaign to keep kids active - GOV.UK](#), November 2025

“Freedom of Information requests sent to every local authority revealed that 429 playgrounds closed across England in the decade to 2022, with the actual number likely to be even higher given that not every local authority responded to the request. Now, over 2 million children in England (32%) who are aged up to nine do not live within a ten-minute walk of a playground.

Where playgrounds do exist, many have fallen into states of disrepair due to a lack of regular maintenance. Over the past decade, over half the population (56%) have noted that the quality of their local park or play area has declined.”¹⁴

In 2025 Sheffield University published research mapping the provision of playgrounds in England. It discovered substantial inequality in provision despite being broadly comparable in terms of population. In London, there were huge differences in playground provision: the borough of Redbridge had nearly eight times more children per playground than Islington (1,567 compared to 204). ¹⁵

¹⁴ [Play](#) Commission, [State of Play Report](#), February 2025 pg 21

¹⁵ The Conversation, [We mapped 18,000 children’s playgrounds and revealed inequality across England](#), 4 June 2025

4. Why are we still here? The benefits of inner London family living:

- A brilliant local primary school – [Walnut Tree Walk](#) which is defying the inner London trend and is now over subscribed with a waiting list. In 10 years it has gone from one form entry of approx. 200 pupils to two form and over 400 pupils.
- A great choice of secondary schools in the area such as Oasis South Bank, Lilian Baylis Technology College, Haberdashers, Pimlico Academy
- [Lollard Street Adventure Playground](#) (currently celebrating its 70th year and one of the oldest in London) which children can attend weds/thurs/fri 3.30-7.30 and school holidays 10.30-4pm
- [Black Prince Community Hub](#) where families can participate in different sports and exercise
- [Alford House youth club](#) a safe space where older children can go to in the evenings
- Excellent public transport links
- Cleaner air and less traffic due to the congestion and low emission zones
- Plentiful local Santander bike docking stations – although cycling still needs to be safer for children in inner London with more protected cycle lanes separated from traffic

Attachments:

Note: This is a list of all annexes provided with this submission. These have not all been published to avoid sharing identifiable personal information.

annex 1	the advertising for the development vs the reality
annex 2	the letter from the management company re playing on the development
annex 3	emails from the developer about safety of water play areas
annex 4	resident google group complaints about children's play
annex 5	email from Lambeth planning about segregated play areas
annex 6	email from the landscape architect
annex 7	sign by the play equipment on our development
annex 8	Local Prk Playground removal sign
annex 9	Landscape strategy for the development
annex 10	Play strategy for the development
annex 11	Lambeth Council's open spaces document about the Lambeth Walk Doorstep Green playground from 2019
annex 12	Our management company's 'Good neighbour guide'
annex 13	Recent communication from management company

Annex 1 Advertising for the development vs reality





Annex 7 – Play equipment sign on the development



Annex 8 Local Park Playground removal sign



PLAY STRATEGY FOR [REDACTED] SITE

Introduction

In preparing a strategy for the provision of play areas at the former [REDACTED] school site we have considered the recommendations within policy documents including: The Draft Supplementary Guidance: Shaping Neighbourhoods - Children and Young Peoples Play and Informal Recreation Supplementary Planning Guideline produced by the Mayor of London's Office and in other relevant National Planning Policy Guidelines, and borne them in mind in the preparation of the proposed scheme.

In addressing the provision of play space within the planned development it has been important to take into account the needs of both adults and children and to ensure that they are well designed, safe, secure, stimulating and within safe pedestrian access.

The main play space provision proposed for the site is for early years play due to the small area of the development and because there is already adequate provision for older children within the vicinity. Whilst there is some provision of private gardens primarily within blocks 1-4 the local authority officers have expressed the view that private garden space should be kept to a minimum and as a consequence there will not be much 'in garden' space for under 5's play, so we have concentrated on the provision of play facilities for this age group, with some additional consideration for up to 11's.

Types of play areas to be included within development:

Doorstep Playable Space – Age Group 0-5 -Within 100m from residential unit minimum size 100m² Range 100-300m²

Described as: A landscaped space including engaging play features for young children, and places for carers to sit and talk. No formal supervision

Examples of Facilities

Landscape

- Climbable objects
- Fixed equipment
- Seating for carers
- Sand and water feature where appropriate.

Other categories of play area for different age groups are adequately covered by existing Local and neighbourhood provision within the locality.

PLAY SPACE REQUIREMENT

To accurately calculate the play area requirement for the under 5's age category we have utilised the spreadsheet provided by the Greater London Authority within **Shaping Neighborhoods: Play and Informal Recreation SPG** produced in 25 September 2012.

This methodology has clarified that the play space requirement for this site based on the following figures is 263.9 square metres. This is reflected in the areas indicated on the Landscape Plan Dwg No 661.1F.

The make up of the residential accommodation is as follows:

Flats:

	1 Bed	2 Bed	3 Bed	4 Bed
Social Rented /Affordable	14	7	13	2
Intermediate (Shared Ownership / Low Cost)	11	10	3	-
Market (Private)	30	39	14	-

Houses:

	1 Bed	2 Bed	3 Bed	4 Bed
Social Rented /Affordable	-	-	-	-
Intermediate (Shared Ownership / Low Cost)	-	-	-	-
Market (Private)	-	-	-	6

These figures have been used to calculate the proportion of children within the development based on the accommodation provided and enabled us to identify the provision of play space that we will be required to provide on site for the under 5's play range. Provision of play space for the older age range of children is adequately provided for off site.

Proportion of Children

	Number of children	%
Under 5	26	44%
5 to 11	21	34%
12+	13	22%
Total	60	100%

GLA benchmark (sq m)	Total (sq m play space) required	Total (sq m play space) required for under 5's
10	599.8	263.9

Full details of these calculations are included within the attached Appendix.

SETTING TO PLAY AREAS

Play areas will be located in safe zones away from roadways and adjacent to pathways so will not require perimeter fencing, instead to differentiate the formal and informal play provision on site we would propose the use of tree and shrub planting to provide a sense of enclosure whilst retaining the visual permeability. As the play areas will be generally designed for younger children who will be accompanied by 'carers' the planting will provide a barrier to slow down the children who might try to run off into less safe zones.

Design of the boundary planting will therefore need to be robust and free of any harmful spines and also be low enough to ensure that undesirable elements cannot hide within the shrubberies and to ensure that the play areas can be easily overlooked by the residential properties.

Where there is more active play i.e. where ball games, or where the areas are closer to vehicle zones some deterrent fencing may be appropriate.

As children's' play can be noisy the siting of the play areas has been located in positions where the level of disturbance is minimised i.e. not in confined spaces where the sound will echo, or immediately adjacent to houses. Although as the available open space is limited some noise impact on residential properties is unavoidable.

DESIGN OF PLAY AREAS

Play areas will be designed to maximise their inclusivity to allow their mixed use of the spaces by families and different age groups, however to avoid conflicts between larger and smaller children it will be clear through the selection of equipment which users the 'zones' are designed for.

Areas and equipment will be designed to ensure full accessibility for children with disabilities and will aim to encourage physical activity to ensure positive health benefits for children who are becoming increasingly sedentary.

The design of the play spaces will incorporate features such as mounds, steps, walls and surfaces which encourage creative play in addition to any formal pieces of equipment. The selection of materials and equipment will take into account the effects of children i.e. child proofing where possible using robust yet child friendly materials and finishes.

It is considered important to enhance the children's sensory experience within the design incorporating features that stimulate through sound, smell and texture in the design and selection of the hard and soft landscaping elements.

Although the development is within an urban setting every attempt will be made to attract wildlife. Birds, butterflies, bees and insects will be encouraged through the plant selection. Bird, bat and bug shelters can be incorporated into the design providing habitats for creatures that

be a valuable introduction to wildlife for the users as well as enhancing the ecological diversity of the site.

It will be important when designing the external areas of the site to bear in mind the effects of climate change and this will be another factor which influences the choice of plant material on site.

INFORMAL PLAY PROVISION

Multifunctional space - Defined within the Lambeth Council Glossary as; A multifunctional space is a 'shared' public space, which meets the needs of different people at the same time. A public space where there are familiar playful or recreational features in the space can become an 'incidental' playable space.

In addition to areas formally designated for play we have borne in mind that: 'Playable space typically includes some design elements that have 'play value': as they act as a sign or signal to children and young people that the space is intended for their play. There is a network of courtyards and open spaces within the development both hard surfaced and grassed which will provide attractive areas for informal play. This will emphasise the sense of community within the scheme stressing that the common areas are there for the use of all the residents.

As part of the general landscaped zones within the development site it is proposed to construct water features in line with the design intentions of the original site development plan. In which there was a proposal for a shallow reflective pond adjacent to Block A, this will be incorporated into the design and will encourage safe play that will stimulate children's imagination. In addition to the 'reflective pond' we are proposing the provision of splash fountains set into the paving adjacent to the pool which will send out jets of water in a sequence of jet styles that will tempt children to play with the jets and encourage active play. This feature will operate in the summer season when the weather is warm and tempting for children to play in the fountain.

The safety of children is of paramount importance in the design of the water features and the design pool and fountains will ensure that there is no water deeper than 150mm which will avoid potential hazards for children.

The larger open space areas will be laid out to encourage natural play and maximise children's physical activities.

It is important to encourage children to cycle, ride BMX bikes use roller skate and skate board as these have positive health benefits, but it must not be allowed to cause inconvenience to other users of the site. The layout and design of surface materials and barriers will be used to

actively discourage children from these activities where they may cause disruption to other users and disturbance to residents rather than signs and rules which only cause resentment. Durability of materials will be very important throughout the development but in particular in areas where children will be likely to carry out these high impact activities.

MANAGEMENT OF PLAY FEATURES

We have reviewed the standard requirements for the management of the play provision as set down in the Draft Supplementary Guideline and this will be taken into account by the developer [REDACTED] when drafting their site management strategy and will comply with the following:

5.10 Facilities to be provided within the development should be provided in accordance with a scheme to be agreed with the planning authority and either;

- will be maintained in perpetuity to the agreed standard by the developer or an appropriate agency; or
- will be transferred to the borough for it to manage together with an agreed maintenance sum providing for a minimum 15 year period of maintenance. The borough should take into account revenue funding after the expiration of this period in future budget reviews.

5.11 The scheme should ensure adequate day-to-day upkeep and inspection, and repairs and refurbishment over time. The developer will be required to cover maintenance costs for the specified period. The borough may also wish to consider other mechanisms for ensuring the continued maintenance. These could include endowments, trusts or friends groups.

5.12 Where it is determined that provision is to be made off-site, the developer will be required to enter into an agreement to make an appropriate commuted payment to secure an equivalent level of play provision and future maintenance. The use of the commuted payments will be determined in relation to the priorities and opportunities identified in the play strategy.

5.13 In phased developments, play provision should be implemented in the early phases of development to ensure that the needs of new residents are met. Developers should ensure that spaces are completed within the same timescale as the adjacent housing.

Agreements on the methodology and management of the site will be drawn up and agreed between the Developer [REDACTED] and the Planning Authority.

SUMMARY OF PLAY PROVISION

- There will be the provision of 3 Local play areas within the site ensuring that there is doorstep play provision for younger children within less than 100m from any residential property within the development.
- Play zones will incorporate elements to encourage active and creative play i.e. mounds, changes of level and structures for clambering over and crawling through, plus a range of other natural features and fixed play equipment that will stimulate their imagination and facilitate healthy exercise.
- Play areas will be securely fenced and be surrounded with an ecologically rich planting buffer whilst allowing play areas to be fully overlooked.
- Seating for carers to be provided.
- Wildlife garden areas will incorporate bird, bug and bat boxes.
- Sensory features to be incorporated to stimulate the children's senses
- Play areas will be designed to be freely accessible for children with disabilities
- Informal play provision incorporating child friendly elements will be encouraged within framework of site in addition to zones set aside as play areas.
- Open spaces within the site will enable active play providing grassland and paving where children will be encouraged to play.
- Water features within the site offer active and fun play opportunities.

30.10.2012

Assessing child occupancy and play space requirements

Size of your development:

Number of FLATS

	Studio	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed	4 bed	5 bed	Total
Social rented/affordable	0	14	7	13	2	0	36
Intermediate	0	11	10	3	0	0	24
Market	0	30	39	14	0	0	83
Total	0	55	56	30	2	0	143

Number of HOUSES

	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed	4 bed	5 bed	Total
Social rented/affordable	0	0	0	0	0	0
Intermediate	0	0	0	0	0	0
Market	0	0	0	6	0	6
Total	0	0	0	6	0	6

Proportion of children

	Number of children	%
Under 5	26	44%
5 to 11	21	34%
12+	13	22%
Total	60	100%

Play space requirements

GLA benchmark (sqm)*	Alternative local benchmark (sqm)**	Total (sq m play space) required
10		599.8
	5	299.9

* GLA benchmark standard=minimum of 10sqm of dedicated play space per child

** Borough's local benchmark

Yield per dwelling by age, development type, tenure and number of bedrooms

MARKET AND INTERMEDIATE FLATS

Age	Number of Bedrooms					
	0	1	2	3	4	5+
0-4	0.00	0.00	0.07	0.17	0.00	0.00
5-10	0.00	0.00	0.02	0.11	0.00	0.00
11-15	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.03	0.00	0.00
16-18	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.00	0.00
Total	0.01	0.01	0.10	0.33	0.00	0.00

MARKET AND INTERMEDIATE HOUSES

Age	Number of Bedrooms					
	0	1	2	3	4	5+
0-4	0.17	0.17	0.08	0.29	0.63	0.36
5-10	0.00	0.00	0.03	0.10	0.31	0.58
11-15	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.05	0.13	0.25
16-18	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.01	0.04	0.17
Total	0.17	0.17	0.12	0.45	1.10	1.36

MARKET AND INTERMEDIATE FLATS

Age	Number of Bedrooms					
	0	1	2	3	4	5+
0-4	0.00	0.00	0.07	0.17	0.00	0.00
5-10	0.00	0.00	0.02	0.11	0.00	0.00
11-15	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.03	0.00	0.00
16-18	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.00	0.00
Total	0.01	0.01	0.10	0.33	0.00	0.00

MARKET AND INTERMEDIATE HOUSES

Age	Number of Bedrooms					
	0	1	2	3	4	5+
0-4	0.17	0.17	0.08	0.29	0.63	0.36
5-10	0.00	0.00	0.03	0.10	0.31	0.58
11-15	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.05	0.13	0.25
16-18	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.01	0.04	0.17
Total	0.17	0.17	0.12	0.45	1.10	1.36

SOCIAL RENTED/AFFORDABLE FLATS

Age	Number of Bedrooms					
	0	1	2	3	4	5+
0-4	0.00	0.20	0.64	0.62	0.41	0.57
5-10	0.00	0.00	0.23	0.74	1.22	1.66
11-15	0.00	0.00	0.08	0.47	1.29	1.76
16-18	0.00	0.00	0.05	0.17	0.37	0.51
Total	0.00	0.20	1.00	2.00	3.29	4.50

SOCIAL RENTED/AFFORDABLE HOUSES

Age	Number of Bedrooms					
	0	1	2	3	4	5+
0-4	0.00	0.20	0.64	0.62	0.41	0.57
5-10	0.00	0.00	0.23	0.74	1.22	1.66
11-15	0.00	0.00	0.08	0.47	1.29	1.76
16-18	0.00	0.00	0.05	0.17	0.37	0.51
Total	0.00	0.20	1.00	2.00	3.29	4.50

Detailed results from previous page

Results	Social rented/Affordable	Intermediate	Market	Total
Child 0-4	16	1	9	26
Child 5-10	14	1	4	18
Child 11-15	9	0	1	11
Child 16-18	3	0	1	4
Total	42	2	15	60

Note: Wandsworth 2004 Sites Original Survey data and DMAG briefing 2006-11

Results	Social rented/Aff ordable	Intermedi ate	Market	Total
Child 0-4	38%	59%	58%	44%
Child 5-10	32%	25%	27%	31%
Child 11-15	22%	7%	9%	18%
Child 16-18	8%	9%	6%	7%
Total	71%	4%	26%	100%

Good Neighbour Guide

For all residents at [REDACTED] and [REDACTED], aka 'The Development', and their guests.

This guide has been produced after a general consultation and a meeting between residents from across 'The Development'. Given the relatively 'high density living' across the development, it is felt that respecting a range of 'common sense' guidelines will enable all residents to enjoy positive day to day experiences across the development. Every resident's 'right to quiet enjoyment', as identified in our tenancies and leasehold agreements, has helped inform these guidelines.

1) Garden and play areas.

All of the communal gardens and the dedicated children's play areas across 'The Development', including the communal courtyard, are for the use of all residents, their accompanied guests and supervised children.

The requirement to supervise children is dependent on their age and understanding and we expect parents to use their common sense. This will help limit children's ball games or other activities that may cause noise nuisance, footballs entering private gardens and being kicked against bin stores, and damage to plants, landscaped gardens, windows, walls and doors.

The reflection pool is ornamental and is not for recreational use. Guidance on access and the health and safety aspects of the pool are currently under review. Courtyard fountains may be used for children's play.

Please be respectful that all communal areas are surrounded by individual households. Noise can travel and reverberate around the development. Whilst we welcome small gatherings of residents and their accompanied guests and supervised children in the communal gardens. For larger gatherings we ask that residents advise their neighbours directly in advance or by providing [REDACTED], Buildings Manager, with a notice that can be posted on the communal noticeboards. Barbecues are not permitted in communal areas.

We would prefer larger groups (over six) not to play or congregate in the gardens or courtyard area. This will help to reduce any possible noise nuisance or anti-social behaviour.

All residents and their guests should clear up any litter generated by their gatherings and leave any area as they found it.

There are no time limitations for 'The Development's residents, children and guests to access the communal areas. But we ask all residents to respect all of our 'right to quiet enjoyment' and ask that unsupervised children should return to their respective homes at around sunset. We believe that this is a reasonable time. The communal courtyard

in particular has poor lighting and is a safety issue for younger children when it is dark.

2) Security

For the security of all residents, a communal access gate has been installed between [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. Care should be taken by users to ensure that the gate closes securely when travelling between the two developments. If uninvited users are found anywhere on 'The Development', they are likely to be asked to leave.

3) Pets

Dogs must be kept under control and on a lead in communal areas. The communal areas are not to be used for exercising or walking dogs. Dogs must not foul in 'The Development'. Any dog excrement must be cleared up and removed.

4) Complaints and Concerns.

We recommend that if noise or anti-social behaviour is a problem that is caused by residents and guests across the 'The Development' that a courteous approach to them in the first instance to explain the problem may provide a satisfactory solution.

If not, residents of the [REDACTED] Development can contact [REDACTED] customer services on [REDACTED]. Live chat or email options are available.

[REDACTED] residents should contact [REDACTED] at [REDACTED] where Live Chat is also available. You can also call us on [REDACTED], lines are open 8am to 8pm Monday to Saturday and 24 hours a day for emergencies.

5) Review

It is proposed that these Good Neighbour Guidelines are regularly reviewed and amended (if required).

Evidence Submission to the London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee:

The declining number of children in London

Parent and resident in West London

7th November 2025

Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry. I am a Londoner born and raised, now raising my own three children in West London, close to my elderly parent.

But this is not without profound and ongoing pressures - pressures that have prompted many friends to leave London since becoming parents. My husband and I often feel that same pull to leave. However, London is home; our family support network is here, and as a neurodivergent family, this support is essential for our stability and wellbeing. So, moving away is not a viable option for us.

What follows is a brief account of the interconnected pressures we live with, by continuing our family life in London. These centre on housing, childcare, and schools. Our children are ages 9, 7 and 5.

Housing

(For the Committee's reference, I have attached some supplementary evidence with this submission, and further correspondence with my housing provider will follow in a separate email).

We were among the first families to move to our street in the [development name removed] in 2017. At the time, our eldest was nine months old. The communal garden that our back door opens onto became the space where he learnt to walk, run and ride a bike - and the same has been true for his younger siblings.

We moved here mainly for practicality: our nearest underground station (Acton Town) has a lift (essential with a buggy), and it was 20 minutes door-to-door to my parents. I also grew up with a communal garden and knew how valuable that shared outdoor space had been in my own childhood. I wanted the same for my children. We didn't know the area at all, but other young families moved in at the same time, and we found ourselves raising our children alongside each other in a supportive community, with children playing together on our doorstep every day in self-directed and spontaneous ways. When they were really young, parents would be outside too. But as the kids have grown older and more confident, we've shifted to passive oversight - watching from living room windows and stepping outside when needed.

These early friendships have been formative for the kids, and having a safe play space directly outside our home has made daily family life more manageable. Our garden enables children to play and socialise independently, supporting their emotional wellbeing and physical health - while parents can stay nearby - perhaps caring for infants or managing household tasks.

But in April 2024, children's everyday freedom to play in our community came to an end, when Estate Management installed *No Ball Games* signs around our communal garden space, without notice, consultation, or explanation. Parents were shocked - and in fact my husband's immediate reaction was: 'our children are no longer welcome here, maybe it's time for us to consider moving'.

In these 18 months since those signs were installed, I have sought to understand this decision and work towards a resolution. I have engaged with multiple levels of our housing provider, including the local neighbourhood team, regional leadership, executive leadership, and resident involvement and governance teams. I have also escalated the issue through [the housing provider's] formal complaints process (Stages 1 and 2), and to the Housing Ombudsman, where our case is currently awaiting allocation. Additionally, I have spoken directly with neighbours who oppose children's play in our garden, and sought clarity from Ealing planning team, planning enforcement, and an independent planning consultant.

Through this process, I have come to learn that our entire communal garden (not only the play equipment area) is designated as playable space within the original planning approvals for our development phase of *[development name removed]*, in line with London Plan guidance. This has never been communicated to residents - in fact prior to me bringing this finding to the attention of [the housing provider], parents were repeatedly informed that our garden was "not appropriate" for ball play

due to proximity to buildings and cars. The absence of transparent, accurate information has contributed to ongoing community tension and confusion among residents.

At the same time, several new families have also moved into our garden community, each mentioning that seeing children play together was a key factor in choosing to live here. This shows children's play is valued part of life at *[development name removed]*, not a problem to manage.

To support a constructive way forward, I developed a resident-led proposal ('Living Well Together'), which set out a pro-play estate management approach, underpinned by corporate policy, light touch landscaping improvements and a collaborative process for addressing concerns about children's play as they arise. Unfortunately, my proposal was met with silence from [the housing provider].

I have also been in contact with our local MP, and our case study has been reported in both *The Guardian* and in the Play Commission's *Everything to Play For* report. Nonetheless, these No Ball Games signs remain, and in fact [the housing provider] introduced a new sign near the play equipment just a few weeks ago - stipulating curfews and compulsory adult supervision, which further limit children's ability to play where they live. Again, this sign was introduced without prior notice, consultation or explanation. And I have since found out that no one at [the housing provider] seems to know who commissioned this sign - this raises serious concerns about internal governance and accountability in estate management decisions affecting children.

This is not simply a local disagreement. Rather what we've been experiencing at *[development name removed]* reflects a wider structural issue: that no statutory duty exists for housing providers to protect or enable children's everyday play where they live. In practice, this means estate management decisions prioritise complaints and risk-avoidance over children's wellbeing, social development and family life - even where space has been designed and approved for play.

We love our home and our community. But without protected space for children to play where they live, everyday family life becomes harder than it needs to be, and ongoing tensions have, at times, made my husband and I question whether we can continue raising our children here. In our case, active play has continued because I and other parents have felt able to advocate for it. Not all families have the time, confidence or capacity to do this, however - and in those situations, I imagine play can disappear quickly and quietly.

If London is serious about supporting families to stay, policy (more than just guidance) needs to recognise everyday children's doorstep play as a legitimate and necessary use of shared outdoor space. Current national emphasis mainly focuses on planning as the critical lever for enabling more children's play. But to my mind, housing providers are the real untapped vehicle we need to work with here, because estate management practice directly shapes children's day-to-day experiences where they live.

What is needed now is a clear policy framework that requires housing providers to plan for, support and sustain play as part of their core responsibilities. Without this, it is difficult to see how families can remain in London in the long term. Children need space to play where they live. This is essential for family life, not optional.

Childcare

We are a one-income family, with childcare costs being a major factor preventing my return to work.

Our decision for me to stay home initially was not financially motivated. Our eldest was (and still is!) a highly sensitive child, and we quickly realised that what our family needed most in those early years was flexibility and a gentle rhythm at home. Once we had two children under five, the complexity of family life increased (particularly before I understood my own neurodivergence), and at that point it made practical and economic sense for me to further delay returning to work, with my husband remaining the sole earner.

However, childcare support requires both parents to be in paid work below a certain income cap. Therefore, because I was caring for our children at home, and my husband's income eventually exceeded the threshold, our family became ineligible for any financial support. This made my return to work effectively impossible while our children were young.

I later attempted to close the gap on my extended career break through postgraduate study. This involved using my postgraduate student loan to cover tuition fees, but with no support available for childcare alongside study, taking on this ongoing cost became unsustainable (and to be honest our family unit really struggled with me having such structured demands on my time again). Therefore, I have had to pause my studies and postpone rebuilding my professional life, despite wanting to move forward.

We did not choose for me to step out of the workforce for nearly a decade, but the system has left no viable route back in. This has had a

real impact on my professional identity, confidence and financial independence. For me, this also raises a critical question: if one parent is unable to work and the other works remotely, what is the rationale for remaining in London at all? Especially for those of us who find ourselves in the position of just getting by and nothing more.

If London wants families to stay, childcare support needs to be flexible enough to reflect real family circumstances, especially during return-to-work transitions. Structured re-entry and retraining programmes for women after career breaks would also make a meaningful difference. At present, families are expected to manage these things alone, and it places real strain on whether staying in London feels sustainable.

Schooling

As our eldest approaches secondary school age, we have become increasingly concerned about the options available locally. As a neurodivergent family, we are looking for a balanced approach to learning, social development and wellbeing - with attention to school environment, pastoral care, enrichment opportunities and a relational approach to behaviour.

However, our local state secondary options are largely limited to [an academy trust], which take a highly structured and compliance-based approach to learning and behaviour, and [a faith-based schools trust] whose ethos and pastoral framework do not align with our family's needs. These models may work well for many children, but they are not well suited to ours.

There are schools that feel more closely aligned with our children's needs, and two in particular are within a reasonable travel distance (around 25 minutes by public transport). However, catchment areas for these schools are narrow, meaning these won't be realistic options for our family, unless we move home. This effectively makes secondary school access dependent on housing mobility - something many families, including ours, do not realistically have. Therefore, families who want to stay in London can find themselves forced to choose between staying but compromising on their children's educational experience - or relocating to access a school where their children can be well supported and feel they belong.

If London wants to retain families, it needs to ensure access to a genuine choice of secondary schools. The issue here is not the absence of good schools, but the way admissions are structured. Proximity measured purely on distance advantages families who can afford to relocate. A more equitable approach would consider journey time by walking, cycling or

public transport. Without changes of this kind, many families will continue to find themselves allocated to schools that cannot meet their children's needs, with real implications for mental health and wellbeing. For many families, including friends and neighbours of ours, this has been the deciding factor in leaving London.

Conclusion

Housing, childcare costs, and access to suitable schools shape whether family life in London feels sustainable. For my husband and I, these pressures have been ongoing and at times, overwhelming - and we have seriously considered leaving London because of this - even with strong community ties and support.

But the challenges we've experienced are not unique to us. There's a Facebook parent group called 'Life After London' with over 11,000 members, where people frequently post about their search for a new place to call home - one that offers similar cultural diversity to London but with fewer structural pressures. Common themes include general affordability, the need to upsize, a more workable pace of daily life, and access to schools that genuinely meet children's needs.

There are also additional pressures on London living I have personally experienced as a parent, but not detailed within this submission. These include rising leasehold service charges; limited scope to extend or adapt our home (and prohibitively high build costs even where home improvements are technically allowed); and ongoing transport barriers. For example, buses that can only accommodate two buggies at a time, bus routes that do not meaningfully connect the places parents need to travel between, and limited level-access tube options. These everyday barriers make moving around the city with young children difficult. None feel significant in isolation, but stress accumulates, and together these barriers shape whether family life in London feels workable or not.

If London wants to retain families, these many pressures need to be recognised as structural gaps in how family life is supported city-wide. I welcome the opportunity to speak with the Committee further at any point, if that feels helpful. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Supplementary evidence

Note: This is a list of all annexes provided with this submission. These have not all been published to avoid sharing identifiable personal information.

Attached with this submission:

1. Minutes from meeting with Neighbourhood manager when No Ball Games signs were first introduced
2. *[Housing provider name removed]* complaint outcome letter stage 1
3. *[Housing provider name removed]* complaint outcome letter stage 2
4. Slide deck 1 – Beyond Ball Games (to Regional leadership)

Case study mentions:

5. Guardian article – [Yes Ball Games](#)
6. Play Commission Final report ([Everything to Play For](#)) – *refer to page 60*

To follow by separate emails:

7. FOLLOW UP 1: Email correspondence with Executive leadership
8. FOLLOW UP 2: Slide deck 2 – Feedback to Acton Partnership & accompanying email (to Regional leadership)
9. FOLLOW UP 3: Email about letter sent to residents (to Regional leadership)
10. FOLLOW UP 4: Resident WhatsApp chat & accompanying email (to Regional leadership)
11. FOLLOW UP 5: Email about new restrictive sign (to Regional leadership)
12. FOLLOW UP 6: Recent correspondence with neighbourhood manager about new restrictive sign

Additional items

Image of first *No Ball Games* sign erected on estate



Image of new **No Ball Games** sign erected on estate

