

MDA No.: 1806

Title: Better Design for London

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 At the Planning and Regeneration Committee meeting on 8 December 2025, the Committee resolved that:

Authority be delegated to the Chair, in consultation with party Group Lead Members, to agree any output arising from the discussion.

- 1.2 Following consultation with party Group Lead Members, the Chair agreed the Committee's letter on a Better Design for London, as attached at **Appendix 1**.

2. Decision

- 2.1 **That the Chair, in consultation with party Group Lead Members, agrees the Committee's letter to the Mayor of London on a Better Design for London, as attached at Appendix 1.**

Assembly Member

I confirm that I do not have any disclosable pecuniary interests in the proposed decision and take the decision in compliance with the Code of Conduct for elected Members of the Authority.

The above request has my approval.

Signature:



Printed Name: James Small-Edwards AM, Chair of the Planning and Regeneration Committee

Date: 24 February 2026

3. Decision by an Assembly Member under Delegated Authority

Background and proposed next steps:

- 3.1 The terms of reference for this investigation were agreed by the Chair, in consultation with relevant party Lead Group Members, on 20 November 2025 under the standing authority granted to Chairs of Committees and Sub-Committees. Officers confirm that the report and its recommendations fall within these terms of reference.
- 3.2 The exercise of delegated authority approving the letter will be formally noted at the Planning and Regeneration Committee's next appropriate meeting.

Confirmation that appropriate delegated authority exists for this decision:

Signature (Committee Services): *Sal Fazal*

Printed Name: Saleha Fazal

Date: 16 February 2026

Financial Implications: NOT REQUIRED

Note: Finance comments and signature are required only where there are financial implications arising or the potential for financial implications.

Signature (Finance): Not Required

Printed Name:

Date:

Legal Implications:

The Chair of Planning and Regeneration Committee has the power to make the decision set out in this report.

Signature (Legal):



Printed Name: Rory McKenna

Date: 25 February 2026

Email: rory.mckenna@london.gov.uk

Supporting Detail / List of Consultees:

- Andrew Boff AM; and
- Zoë Garbett AM

4. Public Access to Information

- 4.1 Information in this form (Part 1) is subject to the FoIA, or the EIR and will be made available on the GLA Website, usually within one working day of approval.
- 4.2 If immediate publication risks compromising the implementation of the decision (for example, to complete a procurement process), it can be deferred until a specific date. Deferral periods should be kept to the shortest length strictly necessary.
- 4.3 **Note:** this form (Part 1) will either be published within one working day after it has been approved or on the defer date.

Part 1 - Deferral:

Is the publication of Part 1 of this approval to be deferred? NO

If yes, until what date:

Part 2 – Sensitive Information:

Only the facts or advice that would be exempt from disclosure under FoIA or EIR should be included in the separate Part 2 form, together with the legal rationale for non-publication.

Is there a part 2 form? NO

Lead Officer / Author

Signature: *Meghan Doyle*

Printed Name: Meghan Doyle

Job Title: Senior Policy Adviser

Date: 20 February 2026

Countersigned by Executive Director:

Signature: *Helen Ewen*

Printed Name: Helen Ewen, Executive Director of Assembly Secretariat

Date: 23 February 2026

LONDON ASSEMBLY

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James Small-Edwards AM Chair of the Planning and Regeneration Committee

Sir Sadiq Khan
Mayor of London
(Sent by email)

2 March 2026

Dear Sadiq,

Better Design for London

As you pledged in the foreword to *Designing a City for All Londoners* in 2020, your administration is committed to “enabling more Londoners to have their say in how their city is changing”, recognising “the roles design and the built environment sector play in achieving this and delivering the high-quality developments that Londoners deserve”¹. And yet, five years on, in our 8 December meeting, we heard evidence of a disconnect – between what Londoners want to see built in the capital and what the sector is driving forward. Holly Lewis, one of your Design Advocates, suggested that “most Londoners do not feel they are shaping the future of London”², while Lucy Bush from Demos shared that “there is a great appetite to get involved in placemaking, which is not currently being met”³.

This approach risks increased local opposition to planning, mounting project costs and undermining local authorities’ ability to deliver the ambitious new homes target of 880,000 over the next ten years. But as we heard during our meeting, there are promising developments, many of which we are pleased to see the GLA has been involved with.

What Popular Design Looks Like

There is an extensive body of evidence on public preferences for building design. Robert Kwolek from Create Streets highlighted from the results of visual preference surveys that “around 70 to 80 per cent of people do reach broad agreement about design preferences...they prefer buildings with coherent frontages, clear block structures, human-scaled heights”⁴. Guests from both panels spoke of the public’s support for buildings that “fit in” and reflect the local character of the

¹ Mayor of London, [Designing a City for All Londoners](#), 2020

² London Assembly Planning and Regeneration Committee, [8 December 2025 Meeting Transcript, Panel 2](#), 2025

³ London Assembly Planning and Regeneration Committee, [8 December 2025 Meeting Transcript, Panel 1](#), 2025

⁴ London Assembly Planning and Regeneration Committee, [8 December 2025 Meeting Transcript, Panel 1](#), 2025

neighbourhood, expressing negative public sentiment for “statement” or “impersonal” buildings^{5 6}. There is a preference for “traditional buildings in form, style and materials”⁷.

The disconnect that can often exist between the views of citizens and those of the architectural community was on show: “We showed members of the public five different buildings, ranging from traditional styles to contemporary styles. Some of the contemporary styles had even won awards. However, the public did not seem to agree with the award-winning buildings”⁸. These preferences among the public were consistent among age, region, annual household income and voting intention.

The Committee, however, is not suggesting that buildings coming forward in London should only be traditional in style. It’s more a recognition that “traditional buildings tend to have the features that people are interested in, nice materials, some ornament, variety in a pattern. You can get the same features with modern buildings, but we tend not to see those buildings being built”⁹. Examples of modern styles employing these popular features are ones we encourage, recent examples including Appleby Blue Almshouse by Witherford Watson Mann and McGrath Road by Peter Barber Architects.

Publication of the new London Plan provides a timely opportunity to prioritise the principles of evidence-based design. We heard from the GLA that the London Plan’s Housing Design Standards¹⁰ already go beyond the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). However, guests cited the development of the new London Plan as an opportunity to go further to embed public design preferences and evidence-based community research.

Since the meeting, the MHCLG has opened consultation on its Design and Placemaking Planning Practice Guidance¹¹ as part of the Government’s new NPPF reforms. The Committee sees this as an ideal opportunity for the GLA to raise the bar and demonstrate London as a leader in evidence-based design, sharing evidence heard during this meeting.

Recommendation 1:

The GLA should update the London Plan Housing Design Standards¹² to embed evidence-based visual design principles (such as coherent frontages, human-scale height, contextual materials, and traditional forms) reflecting the disconnect between overwhelming public preferences identified in visual surveys and community research, and what is currently being built.

Design Review Panels and Design Codes

We heard about the use of Design Review Panels and Design Codes to engage Londoners, architects and planners in the design and delivery of buildings in the capital. Robert Kerr from ADAM

⁵ London Assembly Planning and Regeneration Committee, [8 December 2025 Meeting Transcript, Panel 1](#), 2025

⁶ London Assembly Planning and Regeneration Committee, [8 December 2025 Meeting Transcript, Panel 2](#), 2025

⁷ London Assembly Planning and Regeneration Committee, [8 December 2025 Meeting Transcript, Panel 1](#), 2025

⁸ London Assembly Planning and Regeneration Committee, [8 December 2025 Meeting Transcript, Panel 1](#), 2025

⁹ London Assembly Planning and Regeneration Committee, [8 December 2025 Meeting Transcript, Panel 1](#), 2025

¹⁰ GLA, [London Plan Housing Design Standards](#), 2023

¹¹ MHCLG, [Design and Placemaking Planning Practice Guidance Consultation](#), 2026

¹² GLA, [London Plan Housing Design Standards](#), 2023

Architecture made a persuasive case that “Design Codes can raise the bar for design”, while Design Review Panels “can provide an effective set of controls” to address the design deficit¹³. However, multiple guests also spoke of the inconsistent application and effectiveness of Design Review Panels across boroughs. Robert Kwolek from Create Streets argued that “many professionals on panels had design preferences that diverged from public opinion”, calling for “more weight to be given to community views”¹⁴. While Robert Kerr supported the use of panels as “constructive critics”, not as bodies to “dictate design”¹⁵.

Design Codes and Neighbourhood Plans were cited as having real potential to improve design quality and local engagement. Guests from both panels pointed to the most effective use of Design Codes as those that incorporated early-stage community engagement and greater clarity around design principles, preventing delays and ensuring consistent quality.

Recommendation 2:

In the new London Plan, the GLA should promote the use of design codes by councils that are created in close conjunction with a broad range of local residents (who are paid for their time to ensure representation is broad).

Recommendation 3:

The GLA should, through the new London Plan, promote the development of Neighbourhood Plans that positively detail what design of buildings would be welcomed by local communities.

Evidence-based Approaches to Design

We heard how the use of evidence-based approaches has provided useful insights from Londoners’ lived experiences. Insights that include what works and doesn’t in the design of buildings in the capital. We heard overwhelmingly from guests that effective community engagement, early-stage and ongoing throughout the process, is critical to successful design and support for development. Dinah Roake from the London Housing Panel identified that “people were open to new development if they were brought in early and clearly told what they could influence”¹⁶. We heard how the London Housing Panel has effectively used deliberative processes to engage residents, such as through their use of Community Conversations to inform the London Plan.

Guests provided examples of evidence-based approaches to learning from the lived experience of Londoners to inform effective building design. Post-Occupancy Evaluations were cited by the GLA Planning Team as providing a useful evidence base of resident experience to inform future planning and building design¹⁷. While Dr Saffron Woodcraft from the UCL Bartlett School called on the GLA “to take an evidence-based approach to future place design”¹⁸, citing a current pilot in Camden involving citizen science research to influence regeneration policy. This model was described by her

¹³ London Assembly Planning and Regeneration Committee, [8 December 2025 Meeting Transcript, Panel 1](#), 2025

¹⁴ London Assembly Planning and Regeneration Committee, [8 December 2025 Meeting Transcript, Panel 1](#), 2025

¹⁵ London Assembly Planning and Regeneration Committee, [8 December 2025 Meeting Transcript, Panel 1](#), 2025

¹⁶ London Assembly Planning and Regeneration Committee, [8 December 2025 Meeting Transcript, Panel 2](#), 2025

¹⁷ London Assembly Planning and Regeneration Committee, [8 December 2025 Meeting Transcript, Panel 2](#), 2025

¹⁸ London Assembly Planning and Regeneration Committee, [8 December 2025 Meeting Transcript, Panel 1](#), 2025

as both scalable and offering a sustainable way to embed community evidence in planning. Embedding the learning from these evidence-based approaches can inform better design of future buildings and places, particularly in relation to the new London Plan and New Towns, based on the lived experiences of Londoners.

Recommendation 4:

The GLA should produce a pan-London evidence-based report from its partnerships with the London Housing Panel's Community Conversations and UCL Bartlett School's Citizen Science Academy by August 2026 to inform its approach to future building and place design. This should include visual preference studies to establish the built form, materials, typography, style and streets Londoners prefer, with the results being published.

Recommendation 5:

The GLA should require boroughs to embed structured early-stage engagement (deliberative workshops, co-design methods, upstream policy engagement) in major schemes, supported by GLA guidance on resourcing and best practice.

With the unprecedented challenge to build 880,000 new homes over the next ten years, your commitment to shape a better city by promoting quality and inclusion in the built environment is more pressing than ever. Ultimately, mass housebuilding is a generational project that needs to survive election cycles to succeed. A key way of ensuring that increased housebuilding does not become a political football is by ensuring Londoners like the design of the new homes that are being built.

By strengthening the effectiveness of existing tools, embedding robust community engagement processes and adopting an evidence-based approach, the Committee strongly believes that the GLA can play a significant role in addressing the design disconnect, ultimately increasing the ability to deliver much-needed new homes in the capital.

The Committee would welcome a response to this letter by 13 April 2026. Please send your response by email to the Committee's Clerk, Saleha Fazal (Saleha.Fazal@london.gov.uk).

Yours,



James Small-Edwards AM
Chair of the Planning and Regeneration Committee