

# DRAFT NEW LONDON PLAN

## COMMENTS

**ROBERT DARK,**

28 February 2018

Dear Sir/Madam,

There are two areas under new homes that I wish to comment on:

Homes for rent and space standards for new homes

### **Right to Buy**

Summary

One of the main factors affecting the shortage of council homes to rent has been the introduction of Right to Buy since 1980.

The GLA has to work within the financial framework set by the Government regarding Right to Buy which means that loss of council homes to rent will continue.

In view of this as well as setting out a policy regarding homes for sale and rent **the Plan should say that the GLA will actively press for a change to the Government policy regarding the sale of council homes. This should highlight the fact that significant numbers of people on low income will never be able to afford to buy a home of their own and with diminishing numbers of council properties to rent they are forced to rent from the private sector at largely inflated rents. It should also highlight the loss of money through discounts and the lack of reinvestment of monies from the sales in new housing for rent.**

**In addition the Plan should address one of the main criticisms of tenants in rented accommodation that they have little freedom to make their homes more personable.**

It is worth noting that Scotland in 2016 stopped the sale of council houses.

Background

Set out below are a series of facts and arguments to support this view.

As the GLA is currently Labour it may separately say the Right to Buy legislation on the one hand gives people the chance to own their own home, but it may also be seen as an attempt in social engineering by hopefully increasing the vote for the Conservative party. People need to be made aware that it is immoral to sell council properties at a discount as huge sums of money belonging to the council and the people of the borough are lost. This also restricts how much of this money can then be reinvested in new properties or how much money councils can borrow for new housing. This policy has led to a significant reduction of housing stock available for rent for people who can never afford to own their own homes.

There were 6.5 million council houses in the UK when Right to Buy was introduced; there are now 2 million council houses left in council ownership.

Currently, councils are selling homes three times as fast as they can build them.

The original intention was to give people the chance of owning their own home. Currently 40% of houses sold to council tenants are now rented out by private landlords.

Private landlords charge significantly higher rents than local authorities. In London private rents average £309 a week, compared with the £132 paid by council tenants. Another reason to question the morality of reducing the stock of council property.

**The balance of opinion needs to change to recognise that renting is not necessarily second best to owning your own home. In large parts of Europe the majority of people rent. In Scandinavia this is mostly from housing associations. What needs looking at is new forms of tenancy. Often council tenants feel restricted and not in a position to decorate or alter their homes by for example putting in a new bathroom. People, particularly when renting for a long period, with say a growing family, want to make their homes feel their own and to take account of the changing needs of the family.**

**The Draft London Plan suggests that 50% of new homes should be affordable. In view of the evidence set out above, 75% of those should be for affordable rent for the next five years to help redress the loss of affordable rented accommodation as a result of Right to Buy.**

## **Space Standards**

Minimum space standards are set out in section D4 ensuring homes are of adequate size and fit for purpose.

Space standards in new homes built in this country are perhaps the lowest in Europe. This has happened as a result of the abolition of Parker Morris Standards for new homes in 1980.

It is not too much of an exaggeration to say that 'shoeboxes' are not going to produce happy and healthy people.

**The proposed space standards in the draft document are rudimentary compared to Parker Morris Standards and ideally need to be in a lot more depth. It should not be just a set of areas for specific rooms. It needs to refer to a supplementary document setting out the main family and personal activities for which the home has to cater. Give guidance on minimum space and furniture requirements related to activities and include a minimum area for storage. There should also be a requirement for specimen plans to show how all these activities are achieved. There should also be an indication on how spaces can be adapted when the use changes during family development.**

**Separately the GLA should be actively pressing the Government to reintroduce the equivalent of Parker Morris Standards.**

### **Sources**

The Independent: 13 August 2015, 8 December 2017, 2 February 2018-02-28

The Guardian: 26 August 2015, 8 December 2017, 12 February 2018, and 20 February 2018

Right to BUY Wikipedia

Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government

Homes for Today and Tomorrow, Central Housing Advisory Committee 1961

Space in the Home, Ministry of Housing and Local Government 1963