

RESPONSE TO THE DRAFT LONDON PLAN 2017

I invite the Inspector to take into account the following observations and the suggested changes to the consultation draft of the London Plan, December 2017.

Whilst the draft Plan sets out each Policy followed by the reasoned justification (RJ) for it, in this paper I say why I think an amendment is necessary, followed by the suggested amendment (phrased as *****I suggest that...**). That it is to say, the order of RJ and policy in this paper is the reverse of that in the draft Plan. I apologise if that creates any confusion, but I think the argument flows more logically when making suggested changes.

Overall, I welcome the draft Plan and am pleased to be able to comment on it. **I wholly support** the main focus of the Plan, to plan for growth on the basis of “Good Growth - sustainable growth that works for everyone”. Because of my broad support for the Plan, and my involvement in work with London’s communities, I have limited my response to:

1. A need for a clear vision
2. Consultation and Participation
3. Density
4. Affordable Housing
5. Housing in CAZ
6. Town Centres

1. The need for a clear Vision, Challenges and the resultant Policies.

A. Vision: the Foreword (end of page xv and on page xvi) sets out the Mayor’s vision for London with nine elements:

- an economy that supports more and better paid jobs
- where people spend less time commuting because we have so many thriving parts of London
- good affordable housing
- exciting, cutting edge career opportunities
- access to great culture across London
- a boom in safe, easy active travel
- a greener city
- leading the way in tackling climate change (a zero-carbon city by 2050)
- with clean air
- a pioneering smart city with world-class connectivity.

However, within the Plan itself, as opposed to the Foreword, there is no Vision set out. The nearest we get is a statement (Para 1.0.4 on page 10 with reference to Good Growth policies) which says that “taken together, these policies provide a vision for how London should sustainably grow and develop in the future.” But Para 0.0.29 confuses things by saying that “These (Good Growth) policies represent the overarching objectives of the Plan.”

We therefore have a vision which stems from policies (or are they objectives?), rather than the other way round; policies should flow from the Mayor’s vision. There is also little justification for these Good Growth policies. Instead they tend to be stated as desirable - leading to a passive and incremental approach to change as a result of planning applications, rather than a determined and vision-led approach to change.

One of the defining characteristics of the Mayoral term so far has been his commitment to A City for All Londoners and the implications for creating a more equal society in London. This clearly has the support of countless thousands of Londoners, and **I invite the inspector** to examine how the London Plan can play its full role in delivering this.

I think that the vision as currently drafted does not wholly reflect the aspirations of A City for All Londoners. Consequently:

*****I suggest that** the Mayor's commitment to a more equal society, his determination to tackle injustices and to the active involvement of communities in the spatial development of their areas are more clearly expressed as cornerstones of that vision in the Plan.

B. Challenges: The draft Plan lists two slightly different sets of challenges facing London.

The Foreword to the DLP identifies 5 challenges (third para on page xiv):

- the level of growth
- the uncertainty caused by Brexit
- air pollution
- climate change
- entrenched inequality.

Chapter 1 however identifies 6 challenges (para 0.0.25 on page 6):

- the pressure from a fast-growing population
- the increasing diversity of Londoners
- rising inequality
- the changing nature of the economy
- the uncertainty caused by the EU referendum result
- the effects of climate change.

These discrepancies need to be resolved; there also needs to be a clearer link between the vision (which should address the challenges), and the policies that deliver the vision.

*****I suggest that** some minor changes are made to the current draft in order to identify more clearly:

- *the challenges* that London faces (rationalising the 2 sets above),
- *a statement of intent* to address the spatial implications of those challenges through the London Plan
- *a vision* to do that (based on the vision set out in the Foreword, pages xv and xvi, modified as suggested above - also to include a reference to improving health). This must be included in the main body of the Plan, not just the Foreword.
- *the policies*, which deliver the vision via the unifying theme of Good Growth.

2. Consultation/Participation and benefitting local communities

A. Consultation/Participation. Whilst **I welcome the opportunity to comment on the draft**, I am concerned at the comparatively light commitment in the document to the ongoing participation of local communities, via development frameworks etc.

Local people and the voluntary and community sector as a whole have enormous untapped depths of local knowledge, of local issues and of imaginative and practical solutions that the Plan is in danger of overlooking. Local communities are not the problem (as so often portrayed by some), they are a core component of the *solution* to local issues and their involvement in framing local planning documents can make the difference between success and disaster.

In this section I suggest some key places where simple changes to the Draft could give effect to the Mayor's commitment in his Foreword - "it (Good Growth) is about delivering a more socially integrated and sustainable city, where people have more of a say...."

Whilst there are general requirements for consultation in the legislation, it seems to me that the key minimum occasions on which there should be a commitment to the *active participation* of local communities are in a) the Good Growth policies and in b) the key spatial areas referred to in the Plan - Opportunity Areas, Areas for Regeneration and Town Centres.

a) Good Growth policies. Para 1.1.5 (which introduces the Good Growth policies) augurs well by saying that "Taking advantage of the knowledge and experience of local people will help shape London's growth,

creating a thriving city that works better for the full diversity of its inhabitants”. However, this is not then reflected in Policy GG1 and policies in the most of the rest of the document are worryingly light on precisely how, when and where consultation/participation will actually take place.

Policy GG6 does say that “Those involved in planning and development must...take an integrated approach to the delivery of strategic and local infrastructure by ensuring that public, private, community and voluntary sectors plan and work together.” **This is welcome**, but it is a mystery why this requirement only exists for the provision of infrastructure (which is the subject of Policy GG6) and is not reflected in the other Good Growth policies, particularly in GG1 which is headed ‘Building strong and inclusive communities’.

*****I therefore suggest that** the introductory Paragraph to policies GG1 to GG6 is modified by the insertion of the phrase “work with local communities, and...” after the word “must” at the end of the introductory paragraph in each Policy GG1 to GG6.

*****I also suggest that** a new Policy GG1 G is added, modelled on Policy GG6 D, reading “G Take a co-ordinated approach to building strong and integrated communities by ensuring that public, private, community and voluntary sectors plan and work together.”

b) Key spatial areas. A clear commitment to participation is made in Opportunity Areas. Policy SD1 A says unequivocally that “the Mayor will: 1) Provide support and leadership for the collaborative preparation and implementation of planning frameworks...” and Para 2.1.4 clarifies what collaborative means by saying “Whatever model is used, frameworks must be prepared in a collaborative way with local communities and stakeholders.” **I welcome and support this.**

It would seem entirely logical for such an assurance also to be given in policies for the strategic Areas for Regeneration and within Town Centres. Not to do so could give weight to an interpretation that the Mayor is not proposing such collaboration in those Areas and Centres, because otherwise he would have said so. Whilst that would be perverse, such arguments have been given weight in the past - and in any event the Plan should be clear, not ambiguous, in its intentions.

Para 1.3.5 also says that “The Mayor will co-ordinate investment and focus regeneration initiatives in those parts of London most affected by inequalities, including health inequalities.” His Strategic Areas for Regeneration represent just those areas, as do several of the Metropolitan and Mayor Town Centres.

*****I therefore suggest that** the wording of Policy SD1A1) - as proposed to be amended below - be included in Policy SD10 after A1). This positioning would make it clear that the Mayor will provide support and leadership in *Strategic* Areas for Regeneration (and not in *Local* Areas for Regeneration). The inclusion of this addition to the policy is in fact already justified in Para 2.10.3 which says “...regeneration initiatives must be undertaken in **collaboration with local communities...**” This should be clearly reflected in policy.

The need for such consistency is re-enforced by the fact that a similar approach is included in Policy SD9 A which refers to a Town Centre Strategy being produced locally in a way “that is inclusive and representative of the local community.” **I strongly welcome this.**

*****I therefore also suggest that** the Mayor gives himself the opportunity of being involved in the preparation of Strategies in International, Metropolitan and Major Town Centres (those that can only be changed via the London Plan), by including wording similar to that in Policy SD1A1 (as proposed to be amended below) in Policy SD8 or SD9.

B. Benefitting local communities. Para 2.0.7 makes a strong Mayoral statement that in the Opportunity Areas he and other partners must work “closely with the local community to bring about the right sort of change and investment. Where significant investment is planned in these areas, it is crucial that it benefits local communities...” However this very clear statement is not reflected in policy. This could easily be rectified:-

*****I suggest that** the phrase “that benefits local communities” is added to the end of SD1 A1)c) and to the end of SD1 B2). It follows that this addition to SD1 A1)c) would also apply to the suggested addition of a similar Policy to Policy SD10.

3. Density

The abandonment of density guidelines in the Plan takes us into new territory and will lead to outcomes that are difficult to foresee.

The basic philosophy of the policy is that the development capacity of a site should be “optimised” (Policy D6). Whilst the capacity must be assessed (Policy D2) under the heading of Good Design, the “outcome of this process must ensure the most efficient use of land is made so that development on all sites is optimised” (Policy D2B). Para 3.6.1 makes clear that “This will mean developing at densities above those of the surrounding area on most sites.” The reference to “on most sites” gives a clear lead to the way in which the capacity assessments are to be carried out. (This is re-enforced by Policy H2D on small sites with the presumption in favour of development in defined circumstances.)

Attempts to capture the resulting hope value will be bound to push up the density of applications “on most sites” - but to what levels is unclear. Curiously, Policy D6C says that “The higher the density of a development, the greater the level of scrutiny that is required of its design..” This, in principle, leaves the decision on density to subjective judgement, with more scrutiny and uncertainty as an applicant increases density to achieve the optimum use of the site. So, the more an applicant seeks to achieve the objective of the policy (optimisation) the greater the hurdle that is put in their way.

This is conceptually the opposite of the affordable housing policy, where the more one seeks to meet policy and increase affordable housing, the smaller the hurdle that has to be overcome through the threshold test.

As I say, I am not sure what the precise implications will be. In theory, the increase in permitted density will increase the value of land to the land owner, but may still reduce the price per unit to the developer. This will further complicate the sums to be done in assessing viability.

As there are no obvious answers:

*****I invite the Inspector** to examine the implications of this policy and its relationship to affordable housing at the EiP.

I am not in favour of the presumption in favour on small sites in Conservation areas where there is not yet a design code in place.

*****I suggest that** Policy H2E and F be amended accordingly.

4. Affordable Housing

I am aware that, in the consultation meetings held to discuss the draft LP, there have been criticisms made of the affordable housing policy by community groups - mostly because the strategic target for affordable housing is 50%, which has been set below the identified need (65%) and secondly because the definition of affordable means that “affordable” is not affordable to most people.

Whilst I am sympathetic to the target issue, bearing in mind that the overall target for housing delivery will have to “approximately double compared to current average completion rates” I am also sympathetic to the figures in the draft, **provided that** there is a clear commitment to their review within 2 years maximum, from the date of the Plan’s approval.

There is one strengthening of Policy that I would suggest however. I think it is likely that some objectors to the draft Plan will argue that, post Brexit, inward migration will fall and that the Plan therefore overstates the total need for additional housing, including affordable housing.

*****I therefore suggest that** the Plan contains a sentence (in Para 4.1.1?) to the effect that whilst the effects of any form of Brexit on migration specifically into London are currently unclear, the natural increase in London's existing population, combined with outstanding demand, overcrowding and substandard accommodation, require a net addition of stock of at least the target in the draft Plan for the medium term in any event. If that were to change, the new situation would be tackled through the Plan, Monitor, Review process with due consultation etc. The current figures will therefore be relied on until such a Review.

On the issue of the definition of affordable housing, I note the the definition is consistent with the NPPF 2012 definition and that, within that, the Mayor has set out his preferred tenures. I am not sure that any deviation would be possible and that would stand up to appeal.

*****I suggest that** the Inspector examines this.

Policy H13, referring to Build to Rent, says in Para A "Affordable housing should be secured in perpetuity." This is welcomed, but I do not see this requirement in the main Affordable Housing policies.

*****I suggest that** an additional policy H5C be added saying "All affordable housing must be secured in perpetuity."

On a comparatively minor point, Para 4.2.11, referring to the amalgamation of several flats into larger homes reads like a policy, but is in the text.

*****I suggest that** similar wording is added as a new policy H2I and reads "boroughs should refuse applications for the amalgamation of separate flats into larger homes where this is leading to a significant loss of homes."

On housing generally, **I welcome** the clear commitment to minimum standards.

5. Housing in CAZ

The question of housing within the CAZ has been a major issue for decades. As the person who conceived the CAZ concept in Westminster City Council's District Plan (WDP) in the seventies, and introduced it to strategic planning in the Alterations to the Greater London Development Plan in the eighties, I am particularly aware of the issues.

In the seventies, housing in CAZ was largely under threat from commercial development, exacerbated by proposals to make permanent hundreds of temporary permissions for residential accommodation to be used as offices for 25 years after the War. In order to maintain central London's mixed use character and to meet the need for a range of housing, housing was included as a Central London Activity in the WDP. This was strongly opposed at the Public Inquiry into the WDP - but the arguments for the Policy prevailed.

The issue has never really gone away, the key question being whether housing should, or should not, be defined as having a central London function. The number of homes in central London continued to decline in the seventies, but then the pendulum swung the other way.

Recently, in some areas, it has been argued that housing has taken over considerable amounts of office, showroom and workshop space and the draft Plan appears to wish to curb that. I think however it would be difficult to claim that the growth of housing in the centre has harmed the central London economy. This is particularly so because of the increase in home/work living, where a residential use does not necessarily preclude an office/studio use in the same spacer. Whilst I am sympathetic to the issue, I think the approach in the draft Plan is a sledgehammer to crack a nut. Under the policy I think we may lose too much housing in the centre such that the specific character of central London with its pleasant mix of residential, commercial and cultural uses in a 24 hour economy are put at risk. Other policies in the Plan rightly seek to ensure that housing is occupied and 50%bis affordable. Provided that those policies are met, I see no reason why some further growth of housing should be denied.

I therefore invite the inspector to examine this draft Policy. Specifically, I would invite consideration to amending the draconian wording of SD5 C, D3), and H - bearing in mind the residential enclaves of the Barbican, Covent Garden, the West End, Fitzrovia, Soho etc, etc, all of which greatly enhance the “offer” and appeal of central London. Conversely I would support the introduction of Article 4 Directions as suggested in SD5 F.

6. Town Centres

In his vision in the Foreword, the Mayor sees “A city where people can spend less time commuting because we have so many thriving parts of London, with good affordable housing combined with exciting, cutting-edge career opportunities.” That is a very appealing prospect and **should be heavily supported**. However, it will not happen easily. The London Plan since its early days in 2004 has attempted to encourage Town Centre growth but, with one or two notable exceptions (Stratford for example) really significant growth has been hard to achieve outside Inner London.

The housing policies in the draft LP make clear that a lot of growth needs to be in and around the Town Centres, including the contentious statement that “local character evolves over time and will need to change in appropriate locations to accommodate additional housing provision.” (Policy H2B 1). In general, I agree with that. My main concern is that, if growth (not just housing) cannot be attracted to the suburbs, not only will the housing targets be missed, but the quality of life, with increased commuting on over-crowded trains and even heavier pollution, will deteriorate further.

I think that the difficulties of turning this around should not be underestimated and therefore:

*****I suggest that** the preparation of Town Centre strategies and the release of housing sites in Outer London be given a priority by the Mayor alongside the Opportunity Areas nearer the centre.

It is equally important that employment uses are encouraged to spread further. It is worrying for example that in the Elizabeth Line East corridor, there are only 500 jobs planned in Ilford and in Romford, but 65,000 in Stratford alone (with 110,000 in the neighbouring Isle of Dogs). Greater investment and commitment to preparing integrated strategies, with the involvement of the Mayor, are needed in the suburbs.

I don't think its an exaggeration to say that the success of the Plan in creating the kind of polycentric city that lies behind the thinking in the Mayor's Foreword, will hinge on the success of those strategies.

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March 2018.