
From: Ann Thorpe
Sent: 02 March 2018 16:24
To: Londonplan
Subject: Draft New London Plan

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Dear London Plan Team,

I'm writing to comment on the small sites development proposal in the plan. I support Policy H2 Small Sites. I am a homeowner in Barnet, where a large share of new housing seems targeted. I have a very large back garden and I am in favor of allowing housing development on such back gardens.

There is evidence, particularly from the US west coast, that housing built on back gardens, or even attached to primary houses, can work. These are known as 'granny flats' 'mother in law' units, or 'accessory dwelling units' (ADUs). They typically range in size from about 450 to 800 sf and are common in cities such as:

Portland, Oregon
Seattle, Washington,
Berkeley, San Francisco and Los Angeles, California
Austin, Texas, and
Vancouver Canada

For sources and studies see for example:

- <https://www.centreforpublicimpact.org/case-study/accessory-dwelling-units-elderly-us/>
- report by Turner Center for Housing Innovation at University California Berkeley
- <http://www.berkeleyside.com/2017/03/20/new-laws-make-even-easier-build-backyard-cottages-berkeley/>
- <https://www.citylab.com/design/2018/01/the-granny-flats-are-coming/550388/>

As someone who could be called upon to provide small site housing, I would encourage the London plan team to consider the following:

It may be appropriate to allow a building size that is proportional to the lot available, but the boroughs should not shy away from very small houses, which are gaining favor globally with better and more sophisticated designs. In cases where screening with trees and landscaping is feasible and the lot is large, it is appropriate to allow larger buildings.

The plan indicates concern about preserving the character of existing neighborhoods, and I agree with the idea of design guidelines. But I would argue that some neighborhoods could use improvement, particularly in how the residential areas—even in neighborhoods with terraced and semi-detached housing—relate to the street at a human scale. The relationship should ideally favor human scale rather than an automobile scale. In my neighborhood, for example, most front gardens are paved over for two cars, making the street feel industrial. New housing should prioritise human scale and active travel and the extent that small sites can improve a neighborhood should be acknowledged.

To the extent that back garden units are not visible from the street, they should have scope for imaginative and inspiring new architecture.

In the US, ADUs are owned as one with the main house. In many cases owners end up living in the ADUs and renting out the bigger house in the front. I would be interested to see proposals for how these ADUs could be built and sold on as separate properties.

The economics of building a back garden unit are challenging for the average homeowner. The unit might cost £250-300,000 to build (based on estimates from builders for a 3 metre extension costing £70-90,000 and a whole house plus landscape costing about 3 times as much). But being small, the houses could probably only be rented at an annual rate of about £12000 to £18000. That means a significant payback period for the homeowner who may already have a mortgage. Further, evidence from the US West coast suggests that these units add about 25% to property value, so the cost to build would not be captured in the sale price of typical residential homes in East Barnet or New Barnet, for example. In light of Brexit, for at least the next decade homeowners are probably not going to be in a position where property values are gaining robustly, making the idea of building on available garden sites seem risky and too costly to be worthwhile.

Planning costs, red tape and neighborhood acceptance will also be a significant barriers and this may be an important area to consider in terms of lessons learned from US and Canadian cities that have been successful. Having some pilot projects might be helpful. I have often thought it would be great to get university students to design and build a super-efficient small house in my back garden which could then be a site for research and experimentation, possibly for new materials and methods (I am affiliated with University College London). Could there be other ways like this of making these small sites useful and informative in additional ways? Using case studies and developing 'social marketing' material to promote the idea would be worthwhile. >From my personal experience many of these ADUs are very charming and add to the social life of neighborhoods.

Sincerely,

Ann Thorpe

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