

# A CITY FOR ALL LONDONERS

## Accommodating Growth Workshop

2<sup>nd</sup> November 2016, 9.30 – 13.00

### Intensifying some suburban areas

#### Facilitator in bold

Respondents in regular text

*These notes are a summary of the conversation*

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*Session 1, Table 3*

#### **James Gleeson, Greater London Authority (Facilitator)**

Richard Lee, Just Space

Duncan Clarke, London Borough of Sutton

Kat Hanna, Centre for London

Ian Butcher, London Borough of Redbridge

David, TfL

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#### **On the whole, London suburbs haven't changed that much. Borough housing targets have a huge range, however some are quite low. What is the feasible range on these suburban areas?**

Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) – We need to try and understand intensification on these small sites. The tenure mix in suburbia has already changed quite a lot and has also been increased demand on social infrastructure – maybe we should share what certain boroughs take on? The equity argument can be brought into it – use the estates research. We need to look for easy targets for intensification and how to encourage individuals to look at these sites. Character of the sites may have to change – but suburban will always be suburban!

Intensification is supported within 400m of district centres. These are small sites intensification. 10,000 come from sites, with approximately 25,000 completed.

There is a concern on viability issues with intensifying. Supurbia figures are wrong – increasingly unviable as demand for houses outweighs demand for flats. 3-4 stories were considered too high. If you are intensifying suburbs you will have to put it in open spaces. Provisional parking is always focussed on as an issue as well.

Retired, middle class who have owned their house for years have more time and are more likely to protect their local area. We have looked at intensifying along the Central line.

Public transport accessibility level (PTAL) is quite an issue. It has too much reliance on a single indicator. It shouldn't be around just PTAL issue. There is a concern on density matrix – PTAL

doesn't take into account attraction of intensification. Radial is ok, but orbital makes the difference.

Are there any 'sweeteners' that would help make intensification more attractive to suburbanites? For example, what about mixed-use schemes that created jobs and services as well as new homes?

We can get radial/orbital in south locations. Looking at sweeteners for TfL is in the south/south east London. You need to know that they are dense locations.

Section 106 is largely gone because of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). What are the incentives? Block of houses – council tax from new units. Are the wealthy middle class bothered?

Heavily deprived areas in the south of the borough. Are there any options to the opportunity areas? The view is that suburban area doesn't need regeneration. What do you get out of an opportunity – there is potential to increase density council estates.

What would you get if you were to increase the existing 400m to 800m? You would essentially get a corridor of merged town centres. It is nice to have definition between places, rather than a little bit of housing gain. Need to look at a sensitive retail offer – make it an incremental change/long term intensification change. In principle it would be 3 stories. Need to look at sweeteners e.g. Council tax...Larger scale would be problematic.

In terms of perception, larger areas are more likely to be viable. Large area's simultaneously developed. Everything has to be the same height – might not be viable though (height for light).

There is a slight concern identifying transport hubs - will we still get a slight 'lumpiness'. Do we allow areas to stay the way they are or is it something London Plan should be doing? Living in a global city we have to accept change. E.g. In Southwark more in the centre are rising to the challenge, why not all boroughs. Is this something the Mayor has to lead on? Unanimous 'Yes'. Outer London bigger than Inner London, but inner has all the infrastructure.

Suburbs are changing demographically anyway. When you can assemble enough plots to make it viable. Typology-led rather than targeting specific places in London Plan - policy should identify types of housing that can be intensified and by how much.

**3 Key points of discussion to feedback to group: Suburbs are already seeing change in population & demographic mix - Choice between planned vs unplanned growth.**

**The Mayor will have to lead on this because there is too much opposition at borough level**

**Rather than targeting specific areas London Plan Policy should identify particular type of housing that can be intensified and by how much?**

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**Andrew Russell, Greater London Authority (Facilitator)**

James Gleeson, Greater London Authority  
Edward Clarke, Centre for Cities  
Georgia Wrighton, CPRE London  
Fiona Wright, London Borough of Barking and Dagenham/GLA  
Andrew Davie, Central Bedfordshire Council  
Sven Muendner, Leitsystem  
Paul Chadwick, London Borough of Wandsworth/Richmond  
Lucy Rogers, East End Trades Guild/Just Space  
Peter Pickering, London Forum Civic and Amenity Societies

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**How can the LP enable intensification to take place in a sustainable manner? What types of locations? What type of design quality?**

In some Boroughs, there are proposals to build on green belt and Council support for this, because residents really cherish their suburbs and don't want them intensified. There is always a trade-off between where is best to put development.

Areas around stations and small high street areas where people are more willing to accept intensification can work, but less so in the suburban residential areas. Need to get buy in from residents. Concern over loss of character.

In many suburban Boroughs, Councils and residents are keen to protect the character of the Borough as it is. They are unlikely to accept intensification particularly in conservation areas. But it might be suitable in some locations.

From a local planning authority's perspective this is resource intensive and locally contentious, would it be worthwhile in terms of the potential housing output or would resources be better focused on bigger opportunities, e.g. large redevelopment sites.

A contrary view was expressed that this form of housing could be more affordable to large development sites and would cumulatively yield significant numbers of homes over many years, so would be one of many different local housing sources/solutions. Slow, bit by bit housing output is good and can be preferable to large developers who will provide certain types and tenures of housing. Organic growth can also fit in with the existing local character.

What about the creeping impact on infrastructure as you start to increase densities? Need to capture the impact on infrastructure. How could you do this from a very small scale, piecemeal approach?

Growth can be good if coupled with growth in infrastructure, improved public transport etc. This can help to persuade residents that it is a positive thing if you can convince them that it will be delivered.

Private landlords might be more willing to intensify, where there is a need for lower cost accommodation and a demand for this. If we don't do this, is there are a risk we are going to lose some working age population who can no longer afford to live in London?

As it stands, planning tends to restrict building in gardens and wouldn't encourage it.

Need for buy-in from local councillors and politicians. Eco-town in the suburbs? Or neighbourhood plan approach that would ensure buy-in from residents. Would encourage a positive approach that people want. A top down approach wouldn't necessarily work

Need an example area of showing where it would work, so help residents to accept it or want to support it.

Small scale suburban redevelopment feels like quite low intensity development for a lot of effort and affecting a lot of people. Land assembly is an issue – offers no big prize for a developer. But there is an incentive for the individual landowner to redevelop and intensify their own home/land. But it's then very small scale and individualistic.

Need to work with infrastructure providers to get a better social infrastructure and improvements to the transport, walking and cycling network.

Could you designate certain areas that are deemed appropriate for suburban intensification, to focus where the need to infrastructure is generated?

Sometimes neighbourhood groups can see the benefits of capturing CIL and see the benefits of what it can deliver. Helps if they are already engaged in the process, such as a neighbourhood plan.

If there's a neighbourhood plan (NP), landowners will often come forward as they want their land allocated in the NP. Helps to get people coming forward and talking and building consensus and buy-in locally.

If there's already a NP, could get Council to support it and adopt it as an SPD. Shows Council support.

Alternative to garden development is rebuilding and intensifying existing properties. But probably wouldn't work on an individual basis – but would require home owners to collaborate and work up schemes together.

Could experiment to relax the rules in one small area. E.g. You can build in your back gardens of you want to eg. via Local Development Orders.

Need a mechanism for development that simply encourages consideration of the existing character and ensures it fits in with the existing neighbourhood, e.g. a design code.

Would need to be based on good growth principles – e.g. supported by social, transport infrastructure, local employment, amenities, investment and enhancing local character and sustainability of neighbourhoods – areas 1km around stations would be suitable.

Sometimes there has to be a balance between top down and bottom up. If only resident led, residents are happy with the place they live and benefitting from the fact there aren't many houses being built. Also neighbours will be upset if next door are redeveloping. So need something top down, to allow for non-residents to have a view – can't just be led by existing residents. Otherwise status quo will never change.

Can be too much focus on number of units and density – but actual quality of living space is forgotten. Need to ensure the quality of living is being delivered

### **3 key messages?**

Piloting and experimentation of ideas and then monitoring the impact, so can see what approach could be effective. Needs to be properly tested. Would need to think about scale and local incentives.

Worried about how enforceable good growth principles are. How tangible and deliverable are these? Although sound good in principal.

Trying to stop people needing to travel so that suburbs are more self-sufficient. So not just thinking about housing, but all the infrastructure and jobs that go with it.

Know what the key assets of a place are and ensure that you retain these.

Community buy-in is essential – neighbourhood plans could help with this, or re-imagining places as a suburban style eco-town/eco-suburb – might help to encourage residents to support.

Need to be clear on how many units this type of development is expected to deliver? Don't necessarily need to exclude conservation areas – just need to be more careful about how you do it.

Given the housing supply challenges and potential for this source of supply there is no reason to write it off as a potential option / source of additional capacity.

#### *Further discussion*

Need to establish why we are aiming to promote suburban intensification and what the aims/assumptions are – there needs to be a strong vision for change and mechanisms for how this will be delivered, with local flexibility.

Characterisation studies would be important in identifying places suitable for intensification and change but also in guiding design principles for new development and ensuring new homes enhance local character.

Local infrastructure and employment provision should go hand in hand with intensification, to reduce the need for travel and ensure suburbs are more sustainable and able to accommodate increased population.

Any approach to intensifying suburbs should be mixed use, mixed tenure and involve local authorities and other partners delivering affordable homes.

Planned incrementalism could be an effective way of accommodating more housing but also local infrastructure and employment, helping to make suburbs more sustainable. But it needs to be well thought through and planned.

Supporting small builders would be a key benefit from additional housebuilding in the suburbs. This is important as small builders have declined in recent years and have historically played an essential role in delivering housing. We can't just rely on large volume house builders to provide the number and type of homes London needs. There is currently a bias towards large

developers and this should be addressed. Small builders can be relied on to ensure development is high quality as they need to maintain their local reputation.

Local authorities have a number of issues with permitted development rights as it is so are unlikely to favour the use of Local Development Orders to enable suburban intensification. Planning certainty and access to capital was seen as critical .

Downsizing – local care home provision would enable older residents in large homes to downsize but the supply of care homes and sheltered housing schemes would need to increase

Concerns about the loss of family homes.

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Michael Coupe, London Forum Consultant

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**Why are we doing this? What is the infrastructure reason for this? What are we intending to achieve? Politicians say 'go away' leave our leafy suburbs alone.**

What is good growth? We go through design panels to see if viable, but we still have local residents against it. There is a lot of unmanaged growth.

Looking at the pictures on the table – I thought the idea of end blockers using the upper storage was sensible. It depends on how rundown it is though. A lot of medium size builders are in decline. If GLA support/enable medium size builders there needs to be encouragement or an opportunity to be had. At the moment we aren't building enough of an independent type of flat, to create opportunities for downsizers. For example - we need to look behind the houses on the North Circular. They have huge gardens. We need to turn their backs to the highway and develop away from it.

There are good strong opportunities to engage small builders. There is a bias towards engaging with developers. Maybe because of CIL? We need to provide something for the local people instead of market housing. Housing cost has to be 30/35% of income. You can put on conditions – Section 106.

What about community developer rights? Like planning control – if we had local development orders in the local plan we could get easy approval/fast tracked as we would be meeting the approved requirements. I'm very reluctant for local planners not to be involved. So much can be resolved at the pre-application discussion.

Suburban intensification – We don't want just high rise, we must separate them. Intensification of the town centres/transport hubs must have clear availability and capacity to be right. Intensification of the town centres/transport hubs has to be mixed-use. Mansion blocks 6-8 stories high – heritage environment is sustainable. Mansion blocks are posh flats, for example Earl's Court – high density.

**How would you set the London Plan (LP)?**

Policy in the LP has to be strong, with intensification. There are political barriers currently at GLA and locally. How committed are they on some of the things that have to be done. What do you think must be in your local plan? It is out of date. It was modified recently, but didn't do what the LP has said.

City Hall has been breaking its own policies. It keeps to its own policy. If they are breaking the rules now, what will they do in the suburbs?

The Housing strategy will need to be updated. There isn't enough definition to it. It needs to become guidance or best practice in a way. You have to have good analysis of the local plan. If we had boroughs that had supplementary changes to their plan it would accompany the London Plan.

All local authorities should have character appraisal for their area. Explaining characteristics - (semi-detached). At local and at central government, officers could be pro but would need the backing of the cabinet members. How do you make sure large sites for developments meet the requirements? Challenge - is planned incremental intensification good? Compulsory purchase order (CPO) is making it speedier. Real problem is we pay less than we should. Assuming London is going to continue to grow. What should we do with your capital city? Do we think the continued growth of London is what we should be doing - metropolis? How will it be managed? We need to plan for Greater, Greater London.

**3 key points of discussion - Small scale bottomed up growth - key is to increase small builders.**

**Boroughs to do characteristics study.**

**Mixed tenures is key to gaining support.**