

DRAFT NEW LONDON PLAN – EXAMINATION IN PUBLIC

Statement on Matter M39

Respondent Number	1684
Organisation	London Forum of Amenity and Civic Societies
Contact name	Michael Bach
Email	[REDACTED]
Telephone	[REDACTED]
Dated	01 December 2018

Density

M39. Would Policy D6 on optimising density be effective in achieving the intentions in Policy GG2 on making the best use of land and is the policy approach justified especially bearing in mind the cumulative impact on the environment and infrastructure? In particular:

a) Would the provisions of Policy D6 provide an effective strategic context for the preparation of local plans and neighbourhood plans? Would the detailed criteria provide an effective and justified basis for development management, are they all necessary and do they provide sufficient clarity about how competing considerations are to be reconciled by the decision-maker?

b) Will leaving density to be assessed on a site-by-site basis compared to the matrix in The London Plan of 2011 be effective?

London Forum suggests Policy D6 would not be effective unless Policy GG2 is amended to achieve sustainable development as required by the NPPF. **This is one of the most important elements of the NLP for it to be found sound.**

To achieve that, London Forum **proposes** that Policy GG2 be converted into a sequence which:

- firstly prioritises the areas for focusing development; then
- within them, identifies the locations where high densities will be encouraged – places that are well-connected by public transport, walking and cycling to jobs, shops, education, health and amenities; and, finally
- explores the capacity, tempered by the sustainability of the location, and the design of the development in relation to its character and context.

London Forum has **strong reservations** about the apparent universal panacea for all sites of jumping to a “design-led approach” regardless of the sustainability of the location for high-density development. Indeed, the concept has only two specific policy references in the Plan in Policy GG2B and Policy D6A and para 3.6.1.

GG2 B, despite qualifying clauses, effectively changes the nature of planning from a “plan-led approach” to a “design-led approach”, which seeks to “optimise” density regardless of location.

This approach could be used to promote the wrong quantity and type of development in the wrong places, whilst the current density matrix seeks to encourage higher densities in the right places.

Since this is the new “central concept” it is amazing that the consequences of changing from a “plan-led approach”, which selects the sites and assesses the capacity, to a new concept – a “design-led approach” which is developer driven and based on “optimising housing density”, have not been assessed. This is an untried/untested approach – a leap of faith.

Our concerns are:

- **this is not a tool for planning the location of development** – as presented it is purely a development management tool for assessing developer-led proposals. It ignores the Density Matrix as tool for both scoping the most appropriate sites for high-density development – getting the right development in the right place - and assessing applications on the appropriate density range for any site.
- **from a community perspective, the process would further remove the development of high-density schemes from public scrutiny.** Projects could be developed and agreed between developers and their advisors with planners in confidential sessions where pre-application advice is given, without the density matrix providing a benchmark for negotiation. This secrecy and the potential for planners to be “captured” in these negotiations and result in “done deals”, is a major fear for local communities. To maintain public confidence communities must be engaged in an open development management process as they have to live with the outcome.
- **with a “design-led approach” there are fewer benchmarks and the discussion revolving around design appears to be much more about judgement or even taste, in trying to get the “most” out of the site,** irrespective of its context, acceptability to the local community, and whether the location is appropriate in terms of accessibility to public transport, local services, amenities, local social infrastructure.
- **the current skills and capacity of London Borough planning departments** to undertake the more demanding assessments proposed in policies D2, D6 and D8.

- **the alleged dumping of the Density Matrix is unacceptable** as none of the five research projects to assess the density matrix proposed its abolition, but did accept the need for its refinement to incorporate a wider definition of accessibility, especially to local services, amenities and social infrastructure.
- **the wholesale change from a “plan-led approach” to a “design-led approach”** seems poorly informed, a leap of faith for which we are poorly prepared and for which the likely outcome is unclear. Londoners generally, but local communities in particular, are losing confidence in the planning system. They could see decision-making disappearing even more into private discussions on design between planners and developers.

London Forum proposes:

- **retention of the Density Matrix**, even as an interim measure until the “design-led approach” has been developed and its appropriateness evaluated. London Forum **strongly urges** that the role of the density matrix is explicitly recognised in the choice of preferred areas for intensification and the assessment of their capacity in Policies GG2, D2 and D6;
- **putting more emphasis on the plan-led process** where there are planned site allocations for which the capacity and the form of development is agreed with local community through the Development Plan;
- **further work be undertaken of mapping local services, amenities and social infrastructure**, their relative accessibility, their capacity to serve a larger customer base and the scope for increasing capacity, and, in particular, the challenges of planning for growth/change, such as future provision of primary schools, GP surgeries and the viability of local services. Few boroughs have mapped their facilities, the gaps, their needs, let alone planned for growth at the neighbourhood/community level. Few have seen local communities as the fundamental building block, let alone devised strategies for making them more sustainable, resilient and less car-dependent.

Draft Policy D6 A does suggest that the site context, its connectivity and accessibility and capacity of surrounding infrastructure, should be given “particular consideration”, but then negates that with “proposed residential development that does not demonstrably optimise the housing density of the site in accordance with this policy should be refused”.

Draft Policy D6 B 3A) does suggest that “optimising” density would be dependent on future planned levels/capacity of infrastructure but it fails to mention public transport.

Draft Policy D6 C proposes that the higher the density of development, the greater the level of scrutiny that will be required – it proposes the density for areas of different public

transport accessibility levels (PTAL) which will trigger greater scrutiny, but is less precise than applying the density matrix.

London Forum is **highly sceptical** about how this would be operate in practice, given the increasingly “closed” process through which local authority planners “agree” the amount and nature of development on such sites before the proposal has had any public scrutiny, which disillusion local communities. This is further exacerbated by the Mayoral call-in process, where “optimising” the quantity of housing overrides all other factors.

London Forum **does not object** to higher densities, but these must be the right type in the right places, with easy access to infrastructure.

M39 a) London Forum’s concern is that the “design-led approach” to optimising densities would encourage the development of sites which lack both accessibility to and the capacity of public transport and local services, amenities and social infrastructure, as well as schemes which are in conflict with the context and character of the area contrary to the intentions of Development Plan preparation in NLP paragraphs 0.022, 3.6.2 and 4.7.4

M39 b) NO - London Forum **strongly supports** the use of the current London Plan’s (Sustainable Residential Quality) Density Matrix both to target areas and sites for higher-density development and for scoping the appropriate density range. We agree, however, that this approach needs to be refined by considerations of the character and context and accessibility to local services, amenities and social infrastructure.

Policy GG2 essentially, but not very well, describes a sequential approach to prioritising and identifying sites for development – a plan-led approach whereas Policy D6 describes a “developer-led” rather than a “plan-led” approach. Policy D6 describes a framework for assessing proposals brought forward by developers – a developer-led approach masquerading as a “design-led approach”. It will be perceived by communities as a further transfer of power toward developers, just at a time when communities are seeking not only greater engagement in planning and development but also wanting to have more of role in shaping the future of their community/neighbourhood.

Policy D6 A fundamentally depends on:

- **the context and character of the area;**
- **the accessibility of site to the public transport network – its connectivity; and**
- **the accessibility of the site to a wide range of local services, amenities and local social infrastructure.**

In planning for higher-density development, local planning authorities should prioritise sites, through the sequential approach prescribed in Policy GG2, with the potential for higher densities based on its location. This approach would lead directly to sites where higher densities would be most appropriate. It is only then that a “design-led approach” to optimising density should kick in.

Such a sequential approach would prioritise sites with higher public transport accessibility levels (PTALs) as in Policy GG2. The approach taken in Policy D6A is essentially a development management tool to be applied to any site.

The missing link in all this is the absence of the plan-making function, which prioritises sites in the most appropriate locations. It would appear that the authors, in their eagerness to get to the “design-led approach” stage, have bypassed the plan-making, prioritising and identification of sites, and only describe a development management tool.

PROPOSALS

Policy D6 A: Second sentence should be rewritten to read:

“Local plans should prioritise sites with high public transport accessibility, as proposed in Policy GG2. The optimum density ...”

Policy D6 A (2) Line 1, after “cycling, and” add “accessibility to and the capacity of” before “existing and planned public transport (including public transport accessibility levels (PTALs) At the end of Policy D6 A (2) should be added “See Figure 4.2: Public transport access levels.” **Although perhaps Figure 4.2 should be brought forward to this section**

Policy D6 A (2) contains two 'considerations' and they should be separated. The absence of a density matrix makes it more difficult to see visually and to apply to applications the full criteria that are explained in the current London Plan. The reason for the omission of that matrix should be explored at the examination of the Replacement London Plan. Policy D6 C should have added at its end ‘The management plan should cover the requirements of Policies H5, H7 and H12.’

Policy D6 A (3) Expand to read: “the capacity of surrounding infrastructure, particularly public transport and local social infrastructure”.

The distance from new developments of the services that new occupants will require is important and should restrict the density of additional housing until more facilities nearby can be provided. If that is not done, there could be a need for people to use their cars, contrary to policies in the Replacement London Plan to achieve modal switch and avoid increased road congestion and air pollution. There could also be problems for people on low incomes to access those facilities.

Policy D6 C should have a policy on the minimum density that should be allowed.

In 2016 the GLA commissioned a study of the density matrix in the current London Plan by an LSE team (Ian Gordon, Alan Mace and Christine Whitehead) which concluded that the London Plan should specify minimum permitted densities. London Forum agrees that should be used to assess low density developments.

Policy D6 C does not make clear that the three criteria in it are those that require a referral of a planning application to the Mayor. The words “submit a management plan if the proposed density is above:” should be replaced by “submit the application to the Mayor,

together with a report on the implications and a management plan, if the proposed density is above:”. Neither the content of such a management plan or the criteria for assessment are specified. It is significant that the thresholds refer to units per hectare and not habitable rooms per hectare. This completely disregards the fact that the impact of development in terms of public transport and demand for services relates to the number of people occupying/ likely to occupy new homes and not the number of dwellings.

Policy D6 D should require also provision of the amount of private amenity space and children's play space expressed in terms of the number of expected occupants, as in Policy D4. The Mayor should publish a minimum standard for those aspects of a housing development.

2008