

A CITY FOR ALL LONDONERS

Housing Workshop
21st November 2016, 9.30 – 13.00

Meeting the range of housing needs Table 7 Session 1

Facilitator in bold facilitator – comments in bold

Respondents in regular text

These notes are a summary of the conversation

Session 1, Table 7

Facilitator, Debora Halling, GLA

Rebecca Young, National Union of Students

Sebastian Klier, Generation Rent

Richard Lee, Just Space

Marcus Trower, National Bargee Travellers Association

Roland Shanks, University of London Housing Services

Gordon Deuchars, Age UK London

Patrick Dunce, Homeless Link

Beth Kay, Haringey Council

Andy Shipley, Aspire

Clemie James, London Gypsy and Traveller Unit

So considering the range of housing needs, we have different groups here to think about: family housing; specialist housing for older people; student accommodation; custom build and co-building; gypsy and traveller accommodation; build-to-rent; and live-work-units. If we aim to go through those in sequence but there may be overlaps, or gaps.

I represent the organisation for people who live on water, without a permanent mooring, maybe that's included in the gypsy and traveller section. We don't want permanent moorings; we like to travel.

Shall we extend that section to include houseboats?

Yes, we can be included, though we do have different needs.

If maybe we start of by talking about family housing, how the London Plan should meet the need for family housing, and there's a sub-question: should policies be framed in terms of number of bedrooms rather than homes?

How does that work, sorry?

If you had a target, you could talk about building 50,000 homes, or you could talk about building 120,000 bedrooms.

Ok, thank you.

In the talk, the second talk from Jen, the slide about housing need and demand with the size of bedrooms, that maybe this demand may change because houses may be better occupied in the future?

I mean, rich people will keep getting big, empty houses.

Or something that used to be a family home, the kids have moved away and now there's one person in a big house.

I think she was talking specifically about market housing rather than rented housing; the idea is that in future people will be less likely to have a spare bedroom, because of house prices.

It says there's a demand for homes in the market sector more than in the affordable sector?

I think it is fairly well known that there are lots of older people who live in houses that objectively are too big for them. Some of those people want to stay where they are, it's where they've always lived, but there are various pieces of national research showing that older people who are under-occupying would like to right-size, find somewhere more suitable, but they find a range of obstacles, because there isn't suitable affordable homes they can move to in roughly the same area. I'm not aware of a specific London piece of that research but I'm sure it would be at least much the same situation. In a way, there is a common interest here: to try to sort this out in a holistic way. From our point of view, finding better solutions, finding specialist accommodation or just more accessible affordable smaller lifetime homes would sort the problem out.

So how the London Plan delivers isn't just about delivering family homes.

Is that question cross-tenure. The question that keeps coming up for me. In relation to how the market is delivering and the powers that the Mayor has to determine policies that can respond or address housing commodification. So it's not just the buy-to-let issue. How property is being bought by investors. All developers should build for the demands of Londoners, not some foreign investor somewhere. How do we take back control to meet our own needs?

In terms of family housing, Generation Rent did a good graph showing the only demographic increasing is 20-30 year olds, because people can't afford to have children in the capital any more. That's a problem that needs sorting, or London will become a guest city.

We've already spoken to the GLA about how the London Living Rent doesn't make provision for family housing. It seems to be encouraging the 2 or 3 bedroom model. I don't think the economic modelling has been doing that. How they're going to provide for a third of wages for a London family type isn't there. If we're looking at the range of incomes across families, basing it on average wages in different parts of the city, it means it will be absurdly expensive in places like Kensington. All it will do is exacerbate inter-Borough inequality. Our main point about the proposed policy is that the London Living Rent needs to be looked at from a family perspective.

And have you got proposals over what a more family-friendly Living Rent would look like?

I guess there are some difficulties in the whole way the GLA has approached it. There might be wishful thinking about making build-to-rent work for families. Not just London Living Rent. Making builders do anything that will actually work for families is very hard. I don't want to dominate all the time but we have some thoughts that we'll be putting into this in a written form anyway.

We're given the data, and then many of us don't recognise it. The data suggests that for affordable or social housing, maybe there's not such a huge need. But the experience of many of us, there is a huge need. I live in Southwark, I'm in a 1-bed but I have a child. Southwark Council are actively trying to get people off their waiting lists. For there to be more qualitative research and not just models that are purely quantitative. The real-life experience needs to be captured in the needs assessments of the GLA. When you read it, it doesn't relate to where many of us are at. We need a more qualitative not just quantitative.

Any more thoughts on family housing. Measuring supply by bedrooms rather than by homes?

Building family housing at density is challenging. Extra parking, extra space, school provision, health. From a developer point of view. Particularly the car parking. You don't have to have a car.

The London Plan should be more flexible on parking.

Parking is always such a motive emotive issue. It's local councillors that push for parking.

It should be council housing! If the investors can't meet the needs of the people, it should be nationalised.

The need for family housing is also in market housing.

If they can't meet the needs, the council should build them.

It will cost more to deliver family homes.

It costs more when you've got someone on housing benefit paying market rent.

Right-to-buy is the problem. We all want to build council housing; it's how you get to that.

Build them in the start, whatever happens after, left that be, fight the right to buy, but if you're trying to meet needs, personally I think it should all be nationalised.

We need to make sure we understand what those needs are. I don't know about family housing, but with students there's a real disconnect between what students need and what developers are providing, and making sure we're not making assumptions about what people need.

The next group we're tasked with looking at is older people, specialist housing for older people, how the plan could. You've mentioned downsizing.

Right-sizing.

Yes.

I believe that there is a much bigger demand for specialist housing for older people in London than is being met at the moment and that it's basically land values and economic factors that are in the way of meeting that. A lot of what's been provided in the past is out-of-date and people don't want to live there anymore. But there is - without going into detail - demand for up-to-date and flexible and suitable housing with potential extra care, for example; there would be a demand there. We mustn't assume that all or most older people need to live in a specialist accommodation. Providing enough lifetime homes that are affordable would do the job for the majority of older people.

An important point to add, in terms of housing, arguing very strongly for the retention of the current policies, in addition to that, it's the vital importance of local amenities and local infrastructures. GP surgeries, pharmacies, local shops, making sure those things are available.

That's about the location to an extent.

And mixed-use. Within any new proposal. So you aren't getting developments that are purely residential, where you place people miles away. That relation the transport infrastructure is critical as well.

Very much agree. Neighbourhood planning, making areas pedestrian friendly, benches, public toilets, a whole range of issues like that are crucial.

Most older people don't need specialist housing, but there are lots of neighbourhood design factors. But where people do need specialist housing, can I push you on barriers to delivering that?

Just for older people, or people with disabilities too?

Primarily older people.

The uncertainty around social security. We don't have a final settlement for supported housing. It's unlikely that developers will build any of that until they know what the settlement is. Until you have that, this is surely a big barrier.

And probably not a barrier the London Plan can solve.

I suppose depending on the scheme, it's about land-use. Dimensions of the space but the services you need to include for a specialist development.

That land may be more of a barrier than for other types of housing.

I'd have thought you'd need more space.

Any other comments?

I think once it's built, there's a whole range of other issues about how it's managed, what kind of policies are applied, if it's social housing, if it's market housing. You hear all kind of things happening that shouldn't: people being put into a one-sized-fits-all situation. How policies

about how specialized housing is managed, possible ageism, and possible other issues within specialist housing.

I wonder how much scope there is for the Mayor to offer tenure fluidity. So people can adopt the tenure that meets their circumstance.

Maybe, mindful of time, we've touched briefly on this group, but provision of accommodation for students, without compromising conventional housing vision?

We've spent four or five years trying to fight for student housing, housing that was always meant to be built by universities. Private developers moved in because they were building for the students who could afford it most. In build-to-let student housing, it's a £240 per week average, for universities it's £140. The original proposal in London Plans stated that a developer wouldn't get permission without an agreement with a university. Go back to this original policy. We've spent 5 years fighting for affordable student housing since then. We've got a situation where the private sector owns more than half of university students' homes. We can't attract the students, we're reliant entirely on overseas students coming in. There's lots of planning failures, and this microcosm is one of the worst. They treat it like a hotel product. And they keep building. You don't know you've got enough until you've got voids.

I'd also that, while some universities are good at providing affordable housing, not all universities are doing that; rents are going up within the university sector too. Just having university accommodation is not the only answer.

I agree. But it's very easy to have a go at the universities. We have rent strikes against universities because we're trying to grow our accommodation. What you pay for land-wise ends up what you have to charge in rent.

Without support of London Plan, policies you can't compete on equal terms.

Finance directors like making money. They look at the private sector asking, 'Why can't I charge this?' We say, 'Cause it's your job to support students.'

The whole issue of planning regulations, offsetting, providing affordable housing elsewhere, requirements to make offsetting an obligation: this is failing the planning objective if it's not at the point of need.

It also goes against the idea of mixed housing.

Do you have a comment, Richard, on student housing?

We fully support what Roland has just articulated, we would go further, for example we need to examine the impact on communities and neighbourhoods of the current model of student housing. Though there's obviously going to be some practical difficulties, we'd prefer a campus-oriented approach, rather than huge student developments being brought into communities, because it will massively change existing communities. I'm not speaking against student housing, but this current model dominated by private sector is making impacts on communities. Also I was quite amazed at the profit-level thresholds that are permitted, they're extremely high, there's very little risk, and it seems unjustified that permissions are being given. The Mayor had an academic forum, bringing people together to propose a policy on that, but it was heavily dominated by developer interests. I think students should be seen as people who have rights to housing too. Not a competition between the university/state and private sector.

Social justice issues about students' rights to housing. But you must also consider the community's interests. I'd like to see the Mayor's academic forum rejuvenated.

Can I very quickly come back on that? I agree with un-integrated blocks. If you do make it university-lead, you can leverage Section 106 agreements out of universities. Directly widening participation efforts to local schools, business incubation units, shared with local people, basically universities can have really positive impacts; students are in general very conscientious, and like volunteering. Private developers don't do any of this at all. Student housing could be used to leverage the universities to do more for local communities.

Students are very socially minded, they want to be part of social communities, they don't like being in a purpose-built block, but part of a community. We have to treat students, while they're here, as Londoners, not as pests.

Any further comments? Ok, let's move on to how the London Plan can accommodate for custom-build housing and co-housing schemes.

Could you explain custom-build? Is that the same as self-build?

Essentially custom build is self-build, I guess there are various places along a spectrum for that, with custom-build it might be done more through group of people placing their order, not necessarily an individual. With co-housing, Alan has a particular slide from Golden Girls which he likes - it's about group of older women who lived in shared housing. Groups of people coming together and having shared immunities. That's a very brief attempt at two definitions.

I know people who are into this stuff. They say the real problem is the land; it costs too much, if you want to build a bigger house for people it's going to cost a load of money. You have to be pretty fucking wealthy unless you've got some kind of personal donation or fundraiser.

Community Land Trusts, I suppose.

One of the thing about Community Land Trusts is you can't buy the property to then sell on to someone else. The problem is right-to-buy. I do think it's sustainable if the conditions on the land are that they can't be sold on. You're removing that aspect of cost out of development.

It would be really useful at delivery level if senior officers and politicians helped. There's scepticism in local government, we need people more senior to buy into it a bit more, more research or a bit of lobbying, there's a lot of appetite but we need senior-level support.

I'm involved in the St Anne's group, it's not just private land, it's NHS land, when you talk about co-housing, how you're levering TFL land, thinking about how people can acquire land in a cheaper way. There's a big campaign around the closed Holloway Prison, that is Ministry of Justice land. There's loads of public land available. Clearly affordability could be maximised, if co-housing could be brought in.

I was just going to say that councils and governments shouldn't sell the land off the private developers. Profitability in lands needs to be brought down. Capped rents, then prices of rent will go down, there isn't as much money going into it. I don't think they'll do it.

I think that's outside the scope of the London Plan, capping rent.

Alright, but even selling land. Trying to convince a London council not to send land.

I agree. It isn't outside our remit, looking 25-30 years ahead, a City for all Londoners, it's about the whole strategic vision of Mayor Khan, there has to be a devolution of housing powers from government to the Mayor. It could be part of a whole package that Sadiq Khan is trying to get control of that.

I think he would agree with that.

My main point is, first when it comes to come public land, it should be a requirement, not just 'let's see if we can't get some co-housing', it should be a requirement. Every public land disposal is ensuring within the mix that there is community housing being offered. I agree with you; from Haringey, Just Space said the Mayor should support a knowledge bank on this issue, we don't have enough information, the case studies aren't out there, if the GLA could provide knowledge-bank support.

A good example, new housing products from regen, we get new ideas and call it a test project or innovation project. The housing zone policy in Tottenham Hale, we identified one piece of land as being our 'innovation site', that was one of the requirements. Within our whole portfolio, one site is our innovation site. Now we're able to market that land with a set of requirements which aren't just about making profit. About environment, self-build, we've been able to secure that by going through a housing zone bid, I think that's quite good, that 'innovation' thing is a good way for us to test new ideas.

The Mayor developing a strategic vision, there are possibilities with the Care Act. Not just a market thing to respond to, but a central part of healthy living, a strategy that recognise that, buiding housing into that act. Could integrate those issues and move them away from market forces.

How we can support for gypsy, travellers, and the issue of moorings?

Well we're not permanent people. Travelling in water. Our main thing isn't permanent moorings, but places we can moor. Two main things that we need. First thing is facilities such as places we can get water, empty our bins, sewage, that is extremely lacking, River Ley in East London, and above Tottenham it gets much worse. And places where we can moor, increasingly being taken over by developers, being concreted over, not putting pins back in, turning it into business moorings for a massive business. The agencies that run the rivers, both of them have been steadily selling off what they've had. They have 4% of land on waterways, they're still trying to sell it off. We'd like councils to work with River Trusts and us, to help us provide temporary moorings. And the same goes for the River Thames, most councils have just tried to clear them off. The other thing is that, not so much from my members, but other organisations of people who live on boats, leisure moorings don't need to have planning permissions, but residential ones do. The Residential Boat Owners Association would like it easier for residential moorings to be built. We do not want it on the tow-path, that's for everyone, and not to make money. With families, the Canal River Trust have got an arbitrary distance we have to move. That makes it harder for families to get to schools. In term times they can travel three miles either side of the school. More temporary moorings for families. They said they'd look into the first suggestion but haven't got anywhere yet. Also access to services, we want equal access to GPs and education, we're denied quite regularly from these places, if local authorities could help us tell GPs and schools that we have an equal right, that would help.

So it's come back to wider point about amenities. Other gypsy and traveller accommodation points?

I'm stepping in for a colleague who's an expert. What's going on at the moment because of the housing and planning act is that travellers' sites are being provided based on needs assessments, it was done away with in this act. Already we're starting to see overcrowded sites, children coming up who will need their own pitches, assessments are coming back in Tower Hamlets and places 'need' as zero. We're having meetings with the councils, trying to intersect the organisations doing these questionnaires; we've gone along with them when they do them. Because of the change in definition - so over the last few years, since 1994, gypsies and travellers haven't been allowed to travel. Now with the housing and planning act, you'll only be recognised if you travel, but you can't travel. Most gypsies and travellers are discarded, their ethnicities are discarded. Even though they're interviewing gypsies and travellers, the need for sites are 0, because they aren't travelling enough to quality to be represented. They're stuck between a rock and a hard place. Where it's provided, like in Hackney, it's owned by TFL, there are so many in Hackney, TFL won't give up the land, there's a battle between Hackney Council and TFL, I'm talking minute amounts of land under railway lines. It's often under railway lines. We need an increase in sites, densities aren't high but families are large. The majority of gypsies and travellers are in social housing, they're being split up, every week our organisations are being sent to Birmingham, they're being split up. There's lots of areas, the needs assessment is the real issue. Our one and only hook for accountability has gone.

Is your suggestion that the London Plan includes specific guidance?

The Housing and Planning Bill changes it to people who live in caravans. If you're not a caravan you're a gypsy or travellers. What if the council didn't have to consider them anything? A caravan is something you legally move a meter a year. Obviously if you're on bricks you can't do this.

I think there's a critical issue about Mayor Khan about him recognising and valuing gypsies and travellers as an important issue for the London Plan, and for all his strategies. The current London Plan doesn't recognise this as a matter for the Mayor of London, just a matter for the Boroughs, where the local politicians are being put under pressure, and no progress at all is being made. Just Space would love to see an inclusive Mayor recognise a responsibility here. It should be applied to housing needs assessment, the previous version refused to recognise that they were a significant proportion of Londoners. 'Just leave it to the Boroughs'. It's discriminatory.

And how about how can the London Plan can encourage build-to-rent and live-work units?

On build-to-rent, the central issue we find with build-to-rent is affordability, we're constantly shown these amazing new build-to-rent develops that 95.5% of Londoners could never live in. There has to be an approach that locks in more affordability. Levering more flats for people. Strategically key sides. The affordability issue is the thing. Secondly, there has to be an assumption of security, we hear developers saying they're happy to do 3-5 year tenancies, this needs to be dealt with in more specific ways, because it's not always happening. They need to make tenancies such that there's a role in Break Laws for the tenants. It should be mandatory for all build-to-rent; there's a clear need for security of tenure.

There should be more council housing.

I agree. And Islington is building council housing.

The only one!

And they're doing it by selling off very high asset sites.

Newly built private rented sector.

Who's financing them at the moment, pension companies?

Them, also private developers, they're seeing it as a new longer-term income stream. There's not really a social outcome for it. Doesn't meet needs.

And live-work units, what the London Plan could do for that for that?

What do we mean by live-work?

A studio space where people live and work.

I think policy has moved on. In the live-work model, people were opting to live in a live-work unit and pay business rates not council tax, so the model was not working. What's happening in Haringey, you have a mixed development, there's a deal within the tenancy where you rent a unit and a flat you get a discount on the business rates.

I wouldn't want to do it!

It's often creative industries, studios with beds there too.

On this subject, I wonder if part of this is about supporting young entrepreneurs, we haven't mentioned young people, seems to have been an omission on the list, in part could this be oriented to young entrepreneurs. But also the Old Foyer schemes, my memory was that it was about providing an integrated approach to housing.

It started as a homelessness support scheme.

And it was aimed at the 18-25 age range, almost like a co-housing for that age range, providing amenities with a housing.

Residential design quality standards

Table 7 Session 2

Facilitator in bold facilitator – comments in bold
Respondents in regular text

Session 2, Table 7

Facilitator, Debora Halling, Greater London Authority

Peter O’Kane, Waltham Forest Housing Campaign
Alison Thomas, London Borough of Tower Hamlets
Paul Plant, Public Health England
Byron Nanizi, Strategic Access Panel
Neil Smith, BuroHappold Engineering
Portia Msimang, Renters’ Rights London (CFPT)
Bob Green, Stonewall Housing
Marc Vlessing, Pocket Living

So there are seven different types of need that we’re tasked with looking at: housing for families, where there’s a specific sub-question of whether the London Plan should express supply targets in numbers of bedrooms rather than of units; housing for older people; students; custom-build and co-housing; gypsy and traveller communities; then finally build-to-rent and live-work units. Are there any overall comments, or gaps in that list that people want to identify?

I wonder if we’re going to be thinking about all protective characteristics, what about the needs of younger people, especially around welfare reform?

Singles and couples? 25% of growth is singles and couples, and not families.

Let’s do our best to pick up those particular needs throughout these questions where they are relevant. So let’s kick off by looking at the need to family housing, bearing in mind the caveat that it may not be the main growth area, and whether density and supply targets should be expressed by bedrooms and not units.

One of the phenomena that I notice, in my area where I brought up by family, is that a lot of units are occupied exclusively by single sharers with no security of tenure. That’s a really common feature across London, which doesn’t serve single people and certainly doesn’t serve families.

One of the massive problems is under-occupation of council homes.

It is a problem but a lot people I know, who have children well into their 30s without any security of tenure. The notion of a boomerang generation is all too real; people are scared to downsize in case their children come home. Until people’s children are securely housed.

And until there's suitable smaller dwellings for people to move to.

If we're talking about families and downsizing, we are talking about housing for older people as well, that's not just downsizing to smaller units, but appropriately located units. It's about local infrastructure pulling those units together.

This came up in in the last session, providing suitable accommodation for people currently living in big family housing. Are there any other points people want to raise?

Security. For parents having to deal with their kids and having to move schools. Schools in London having an enormous churn-factor.

I was struck on the tube today about people, who have obviously had to move, commuting to get back to the school where they're established. It's really hard on these kids when parents have had to move.

Can I ask about the level of aggregation here? There's a danger that the GLA have a macro view across London, but you need it to work in localised areas, or Londoners are going to be moving around the city. To live in their community close to their children, close to their work, we're putting pressure on the transport system because of the way housing relates to jobs and available types of accommodation. There's a danger of the GLA taking only a macro-view.

One of the real problems we have in this country is that we have such low labour-mobility. We have a very unevenly distributed economy between north and south, and in London in particular we've priced people out comprehensively from all entry-level accommodation.

In the health service, people on low incomes travel long distances, to provide the infrastructure. We need to be guarded against a macro-analysis at a GLA level. It's fine if you're a degree-level or masters-degree for you to move around the country. If you're on a low-income cleaning job, you don't want to be travelling.

London has much poorer levels of mobility, people living in different parts of the city and beyond in order to get to work. We're very entrenched in our habits about where we want to live. We think it's our right to live where we are born in a way other countries don't.

Pushing on that point about the implications for the London Plan.

Every local authority thinks it's about making mini-London everywhere. But there are places in London that would be better for families and couples.

But what about couples who end up as families? Studio 1 beds in housing developments could lead to family housing; once you bring in affordability they may not be able to move out.

If you've got a 1-bed flat in Zone 2, you will have to move to Zone 5 or 6. We are not good at encouraging that, people don't like it.

So there's a tension between location, affordability and need.

It feels a bit like: do we have areas in London that are for this demographic of people, or do we encourage mixing. Practically it's much easier to divide people. Ethically the argument is that it's not right to separate people. This is maybe more to do with transport, there are some places

on the outskirts of London, you can get to the centre of London in 20 minutes, whereas within London it can take you an hour. I think there's an ethics versus practicality argument.

We need to look at families as not just biological. For example, we may build up a network of support after previous negative experiences in natural families. If we've had negative experiences with our biological families, we make our own families, so we need to ask what is family. And how does the London Plan recognise the need for people to flee across boundaries if they're experiencing domestic abuse? That's a problem I know for a lot of our clients.

And gang abuse is becoming a growing issue, young men needing to flee.

So that's about mobility being necessary. Let's move on to the issue of specialist housing for older people, particularly the question of what are the main barriers for creating specialist housing?

My interest is more how we can create flexible housing stock. We know most older people would prefer to age in place, whether that's in the actual dwelling or just in that community. What we build needs to retain the features of flexibility and adaptability. Older people's needs will have to be met by the general market. And making sure that there's an adequate amount of wheelchair access for people who need it. We're increasingly hearing about younger disabled people who have the opportunity to work but can't take it because they can't afford to live there.

So it's the labour mobility issue again, but a particular need. Any other comments on those barriers?

One is perceived benefit tourism, social care disappearing, authorities don't want to support provisions in their neighbourhood, what is appropriate versus what meets need. Town centres make sense as providers of infrastructure.

There's a Dutch scheme I went to, where retirement housing allocated accommodation to mainly medical staff on the top floor, at a deeply subsidised rent. Retirees would be on the bottom floor with gardens; they had been targeted to get out of private housing. The keyworkers were encouraged but not obligated to meet people on the ground floors, and find someone who they could care for. When I returned a year and a half later, it was incredible. Dementia rates were plummeting. It was a very nice, delicate piece of social engineering, creating a community that was socially balanced.

There's a deeper emotional thing to consider as well; once older people get the idea that they are going into a home it becomes a big drama. But that isn't accurate, once they're in the home they love it, but 'you're putting me in a home' is hard. They're also extortionately expensive. I know one lady who went on cruises non-stop because it was cheaper. There was a doctor on board, everything. Softening the old people's home approach so that it's less undignified for them, especially if they've fought in wars and are proud. The stigma isn't very nice.

How do we keep people independent long enough to not need specialist help? One of the things we're looking at is that we need to recognise that they're not just one community, but a mixed community, and solution needs to reflect that appropriately. What we don't mean is standardised homes in the middle of nowhere with no transport.

That's really important. Someone who is physically active, who can traverse public spaces, who can walk to shops, more people wouldn't need support if those things were possible. It can't be

an all-or-nothing decision. People grow old; they don't just wake up on a Monday morning being old.

It's a good opportunity to look around the world and see what other countries are doing, Sweden and across the US, there's LGBT older accommodation, there isn't that here, you can meet more than one community's need where older people will feel less isolated. Creating solutions for communities across the whole of London.

Couldn't you just look at the function of needs to meet, rather than just categorise people? It strikes me in all of this we're going back to good community, mixed design, but categorising people doesn't help them or meet you solution. You seem to categorise people, not their needs.

The research tends to show that socialised isolation is the biggest single issue for older people: loneliness.

If you can address loneliness you can address a lot of the medical issues.

My grandma downsized into Zone 1; it was the best decision she ever made.

We've lost a lot of local community officers. In Europe they have them. My father, once my mother died, got a letter from an officer saying you might have an interesting question about how you survived the war. They invited him to talk to kids and the local community, he gave his story, which was amazing, and he's been out for tea ever since. It took an officer seeing that his wife had died, he was turning 85, and reaching out.

The rate of deterioration increases when people are alone.

This point addressing isolation is a key.

This is one of the social mobility issues; older people become isolated when they move. My mother, who was an RE teacher, knew a lot of kids and parents who sometimes became grandparents, she knew everyone, she was the one who married a black man; she has superstar status in that same community.

We're doing a good job of deconstructing the questions. I'm interested what we'll make of the next question: how the plan can accommodate plans for students, without compromising conventional provision, which it's been criticised in the past for doing.

There seems to be loads of student provisions to the detriment of other tenures. There are about 3000 new units around north Islington.

Near where I live a load of units have been delivered in one area, there aren't any local shops.

But you got a load of gyms!

Right, you aren't getting the range of diverse amenities that a standard community would have.

A lot of the units in the estate were right-to-buy and are now student accommodation.

Academia is the fourth largest economic activity in London today, if you reduce London's attractiveness, you undermine commercial fabric of the town fairly quickly. I'm certainly not a

Brexit, but you could frame it in that language, you should distribute students more fairly and broadly across the country. Back to this problem of balance, the GDP of all core cities is less than the national average, apart from Bristol and London. Universities should distribute students across the UK and more broadly, and the Mayor of London should have a view of that. We don't want to lose students, one of Theresa May's problems was putting international students in immigration stats. How do you square wanting to have international students with liveable spaces, the capital should have a limit. UCL should have a subsidiary in Nottingham, in Birmingham.

The biggest issue for students is cost. The developers have seen they can get a lot of money; rent has rocketed by 52% in the last 5 years for UCL people. I suspect that the boom is over, through a combination of Brexit and May. If you ask students why they come to London, London is an attraction. I think you can't just pour students around the country; they want to be here for certain reasons.

When I was living in Spain, people would ask, 'Do you know so-and-so because she lives in London?', and what they meant was Manchester, London. It's not exactly confusion, but people in other places think of England as London. One girl was in Manchester, London. You can take people further than you imagine.

We have housing standards, we don't have standards for student accommodation, they only have to meet building regulations.

I have no problem with that whatsoever. Frankly space standards for student would be bonkers.

But some design standards. Quality is the issue for students. At the moment it doesn't have to meet any key criteria.

The collective buildings are often worse than most student housing.

There are two very different types of students. Home students and international students. The main issue for home students is money. International students want to live in the centre of London, they want to go out and have their Prada spending sprees. To talk about students as a whole is a bit ridiculous. The UK is trying to put a stop to the UK student scene, by trying to do apprenticeships, etc.

So students aren't one monolithic group. So, next on our list, how can the plan accommodate for custom-build housing or co-housing schemes?

By changing things in London housing. There is a description of value in London planning that implies it's totally monetary, as opposed to having a social value. 'Best value' is a nasty definition of values. Best value should be what serves the people. The money spent on housing directly can be a saving to people in other budgets. The scope for that is too narrow, saying that 'this site is worth XYZ'. I think in 2011 when the right-to-build came back, one of the things taking into account the benefit of making community land trusts, which bring rise to people's overall levels of wellbeing, it always has to be balanced against the land value.

You need the Mayor of London to say that state-aid rules don't apply in the same way, same with public land release that serves social goods. Borough solicitors say they're interpreting EU law; they're actually talking about state-aid rule. We're a country where public land release has never been used strategically; we just sell it to Candy & Candy for the highest price in order to fill individual budget holes. We need a kind of joined-upness. The Borough solicitor and finance

director will always feel pressure to get the best value. They can then be never criticised for not maximising income. All those other interests, housing, planning, other interests, are swept aside. The only way to avoid that is to tax public landholders unless they fulfil certain criteria when they release public land.

There's a deal being signed in December about public land release and how it relates to the Treasury. The NHS holds onto land because it's not in their interests to hand receipts to the Treasury. All public sector land needs to change devolution rule so that the public sector keeps a level of the receipts to fund public infrastructure, changing the incentive mechanisms. You're going to be looking at a different system if the deal is signed in a month's time.

If you have a devolution deal, surely the NHS will sell it for the biggest price because of their deficit. Tax doesn't stop them selling to Candy & Candy does it? If Portia knocks on your door and you say can we do a community trust, any they say no, or we're going to think about it and we have to sit on this for ages. We should be able to register this and make them come forward in 12 months with a proposal, a release plan, and if they haven't sold it after 5 years they get taxed.

But let's take a specific example. Holloway Prison - the prison service needs the money - it's being driven to sell it for highest value. How can we stop that? Is it possible in planning terms, around affordability or accessibility?

From a GLA point of view, it needs to be able to categorise the use for planning purposes in terms of the wider social benefits, or at minimum the cost of the housing that becomes available from that site. But that's a very long project.

I would put it to you that it's not the public landholders who want to sell their land; the main problem is public landholders who don't want to do anything at all. The stage 2 problem is them then selling it for the most it can get.

It's not necessary. It's simple to come up with a series of incentives where it becomes punitive for them to sell it for best value. We'll tax you less for every bit of community interest until eventually there's no tax.

Who pays the tax?

The landholder. You have to force them to the table.

Your solution will push the NHS further into debt.

Yes, because that's a national problem. There's a hierarchy of needs here. I find it really difficult that the NHS sold Middlesex hospital for the maximum amount of money, and two weeks later the Treasurer of the NHS is looking to rent land to build nursing homes; you could have built nursing homes on that land and you didn't do it. Public land is the last resource that London has to tackle this crisis.

So a Section-106-type stamp duty?

Yes, exactly.

Now, the final three groups in our list, maybe we can pick some of particular interest to any of you: gypsy and traveller accommodation, build-to-rent and live-work units. Are any of those hot-topics for people at the table?

Live-work units are the future, them and shared spaces. The way technology is changing the way we're living, everybody is doing 1 or 2 days at home already. But there's a real issue with loneliness, people working at home all the time. There's a great shared space in Soho, the Timber Yard, it's like a Disneyland Starbucks...

Sounds terrifying!

There's all these uber-cool people doing their work there. But these shared workspaces are expensive. Maybe the government should get involved in that. I think they need to be on top of the change in trends, working from home is a massive thing.

So definite recognition of the need for live-work units?

I think they need to get involved in shared spaces.

Do you think they should be repurposing public libraries to that ambition? Because god knows they're closing.

We looked in the Silver Lining Report, we need a community hub; we described what it was, the youngest person described what she thought was Waterstones, the rest of us described a library, it was basically the same thing.

They need to be open to a wider demographic. If workspace was there, older people are big users of libraries. There would be a cross-fertilisation of communities. They're always really busy if they aren't closed down.

There's then the negative impact on overcrowded family housing, where students can't go and work quietly anywhere. I would like to see libraries repurposed.

We have to talk about gypsies.

Are you talking about sites of mixed housing?

Are you allowed to say gypsies or travellers?

You say both.

Gypsy is an ethnic group, traveller isn't necessarily. Generally it's the Roma who are the gypsies spread across the world.

It's all about priorities and needs, we have thousands of refugees arriving in London, it's incredible difficulty for local authorities to support these groups. Why do they get more designation than refugees from Syria?

They're indigenous. They're a seriously oppressed group, pulled out of their caravans by their hair in the 1960s.

Increase the density of their sites. Double-decker caravans.

In the last session, someone was suggesting a redefinition, because needs assessments say there is 0 need.

There hasn't been a strategic view on it; it's been viewed as a local issue historically, which is a bit of a dodge.

So GLA shouldn't be supporting Boroughs, but supporting on a strategic level.

Yes, support Boroughs in addressing local need.

Is there still a requirement from every Borough to provide sites?

I think that's been weakened. If we accept that there's a need, the GLA's role is to incentivise Boroughs, where sometimes Boroughs just don't have sites and hope they go somewhere else. My understanding is that there's been a huge social revolution in that community, that French idea of how you live, it's changing the way many gypsies and travellers think about how the live. It's come from the French community, tee-totalling, all that stuff, and it's now the majority in France and it's moving to become the majority here.

There's a big regeneration of born-again Christians among communities in Spain.

With the gypsy subject, it's important to think about the way it impacts on the local society, if you've got an older couple and have a traveller site at the end the end of the road, I don't want to generalise, we all know the topics that come along with that subject. To be fair to both sides you have to consider the local community equally. Local community is being under-represented in these situations, animosity is building, and it creates conflict.

Outside of London, there are great sites being built with the support of local communities. GLA should get good practice guides from outside of London.

One of the things is facilities and provision on those sites.

Vale of Health, my daughter lived there for a few months; they're a really good one in Hampstead. It doesn't hassle anybody, it has space, a good shower block, somewhere to empty portable loos. Rubbish collection.

It's the infrastructure.

Exactly.

To briefly return to live-work, it creates very lonely people, and people are abusing live-work planning that they've got. It would be helpful for Mayor of London to stop live-work altogether and create proper community spaces.

Problem with small separate work units is that people then have to fork out for units and where they live. That's why it becomes combined, look at the warehouse units in Tottenham.

I think I'm struck that the consistent thing has been deconstructing the questions. Looking at wider needs, the links between different groups; it's hard to think about topics in isolation.