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# Estate Renewal in the Real World

A joint paper from Future of London, New London Architecture and Urban Design London

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In the face of reduced public funding, escalating land values and increased pressure on property assets, estate renewal has become an increasingly important option for meeting housing need across London.

Social housing makes up around 25% of London's stock, or 800,000 homes, mostly within social housing estates, both small and large (GLA, 201). Rethinking, rebuilding and/or refurbishing these estates must be financially viable, socially and politically attractive, deliverable and sustainable, or we risk perpetuating a cycle of inward-facing estates and divided communities that don't deliver on their potential.

In November 2014, three capacity-crowd events – held by **Future of London** (FoL), **New London Architecture** (NLA), and **Urban Design London** (UDL) – drew attention to a growing cross-sector effort to replicate successful estate renewal strategies, challenge policies and practices that aren't working, and test promising approaches across the Capital.

More than 50 key actors from the public, private and third sectors contributed ideas and experiences, with a focus on partnerships, successful

schemes and local authority innovation. Future of London's November 6th conference took a two-pronged approach, addressing strategic issues such as funding and alternative models as well as 'front-line' issues including design and CPOs; the November 11th NLA breakfast looked at a series of case studies of current London estate regeneration projects presented by council housing and regeneration directors; and the November 18th UDL event provided more detail on council thinking about what they are doing, why and how.

David Lunts, GLA Executive Director of Housing and Land, opened the Future of London event by saying that after touring regeneration projects in New York, he came home thinking that, in this arena at least, London is leading the way. He acknowledged that land values, community and political resistance and the process itself – among other factors – hinder estate renewal on the scale London needs, but said those same high values, along with new funding sources and innovative thinking, can also offer a way through.

Both the NLA and UDL events confirmed this sense of measured optimism, at least amongst boroughs.

"Given the deep cuts in council budgets," said Julian Hart after UDL's event, "it may seem surprising to find councils so keen to deliver housing themselves and to address the huge challenges around regenerating failed and failing estates, but there seem to be a number of factors at play.

"The combined effects of Housing Revenue Account reforms and central government cuts to housing grant seem to have spurred councils to explore alternatives for regeneration delivery. We are seeing a collective bout of creative thinking; old political prejudices about 'what should be' are melting away and new options and opportunities are being explored and embraced. For example, several councils are planning to build full-market-rent properties, unimaginable a few years ago."

Though their contexts and approaches differ, Barnet, Ealing, Barking & Dagenham and Westminster are among the growing number of local authorities pursuing their own development plans, and their regeneration leads shared their experiences at the NLA breakfast.

Ealing's Pat Hayes, who spoke at the FoL and NLA events, said his borough has taken a developer role

in “genuinely addressing housing needs across the borough,” often by refurbishing council housing to a high standard and letting it to a mix of tenures, to generate a sense of place without wholesale replacement. Ealing is also setting up its own company to build private-rented housing alongside estate regeneration schemes. “Forget about the old model,” said Hayes. “Think about borrowing against a general fund and councils doing much more of a varied product than just social housing. We can do estate regeneration in a different way.”

Barking & Dagenham’s Jeremy Grint told the NLA group his borough, despite having the lowest HRA borrowing cap in the Capital, is focused on creating more mixed communities and has set up special purpose vehicles to improve housing delivery. The authority has delivered 800 homes in the last four years and has 400 more in the pipeline by March 2016. The key, said Grint, is ensuring that finance, housing and regeneration departments work collaboratively with their cabinet members.

Barnet’s Stephen McDonald said his borough, like Barking & Dagenham, is also taking a developer role, and has built up its skills base and operational capacity through its 2013 partnership with Capita. Barnet is set to build some 16,000 homes for rent, shared ownership or private sale over the next 20 years.

The City of Westminster operates in a very different context, with scant open land and an average house-price-to-income ratio of 18:1. To move regeneration works ahead, Head of Major Projects Tristan Samuels said his authority has made a point of engaging with residents early on schemes like Tollgate Gardens and Ebury Bridge, and plans to deliver 800 new homes and 280 jobs in its latest regeneration phase. That proactive stance is also working at Camden’s Bourne Estate, according to Tibbalds director Hilary Satchwell, which is providing 75 new homes amidst listed

buildings, conservation areas – and residents who wanted the new homes within the estate.

These borough efforts show increasing sophistication as well as emerging confidence. As UDL’s Hart noted, early projects are being built out, and some estates have been turned around physically, socially and seemingly viably. These successes have required pioneering approaches on a variety of fronts including funding, land assembly, design, delivery vehicles, engagement with resident communities – and partnering.

Future of London’s conference and ongoing estate renewal programme touch on several of those areas, particularly as they relate to partnerships.

“There’s a lot of fresh thinking opening up in estate regeneration,” said FoL director Lisa Taylor, “and while promising schemes have started to dot the Capital, obstacles ranging from commercial considerations to plain overwork mean that strategies, ideas and products aren’t shared as widely as they could be. We want to help with that, and to investigate some of the tricky areas stakeholders are working through,” including:

**Timing:** At the current speed of planning and delivery, London will be hard-pressed to produce enough homes for current residents, let alone the expected increase, and several conference speakers called for the process – or at least elements of it – to move much faster. However, others like GVA’s Gerry Hughes pointed out that projects with meaningful consultation time built into the pre-application and application phases faced the fewest challenges. A timeframe of 15 months to approval may feel long, but it’s faster than five or 10 years mired in the courts.

**Skills:** A huge range of skills is needed for estate renewal partnerships; does each party – especially boroughs and housing associations – need to ‘skill up’ to

safeguard its aims? One speaker pointed out that with “everyone trying to do everyone else’s job” it might be best to focus on existing expertise, but given the public-sector concerns FoL has heard about negotiation and related skills, there are clearly areas of cross-sector knowledge to build upon.

**Goals:** Signing an agreement doesn’t automatically produce a shared view of outcomes. Influential parties who aren’t signatories can always raise red flags, but even proactive partners can clash when they don’t or can’t fully acknowledge their respective goals. This is one benefit of vehicles like joint ventures, set up apart from councils, with their own agreed teams and terms.

**What and for whom:** There are many issues surrounding density and design, especially as they relate to resident choice v. the ‘greater good’ of housing Londoners within GLA boundaries or at least close to transport nodes and/or jobs. There is growing emphasis on community factors like tenant support and place-making, but as Pollard Thomas Edwards’s Andrew Beharrell put it, it’s worth aiming high where possible, to create “aspirational council housing” and to neutralise the stigma tied to social housing.

There are also structural obstacles to making the most of estate regeneration, including materials and labour shortages, the impacts of Right to Buy, and financial and political risk.

Future of London will address the above throughout 2015, and UDL’s new *Estate Regeneration Source Book* provides details on the cases here and several more across London, while NLA will be conducting a major insight study into innovative housing delivery methods for London, with results announced in the autumn. Watch for events and reports from all three organisations in the months to come.



## About us

### Future of London

Future of London is an independent not-for-profit policy network focused on the challenges facing regeneration, housing, infrastructure and economic development practitioners in the Capital.

Web: [futureoflondon.org.uk](http://futureoflondon.org.uk)

### Event details

*Delivering Estate Renewal*, 6 Nov 2014. Sponsored by Lend Lease, GVA, Countryside, Pollard Thomas Edwards and London Communications Agency, with support from Lovell and Lewis Silkin.

Summary: <http://bit.ly/1vJdiy5>

### Event contributors:

- Mark Baigent, RB Greenwich
- Ken Baikie, Peabody
- Andrew Beharrell, Pollard Thomas Edwards
- Richard Blakeway, GLA
- Yinka Bolaji, Genesis
- Chris Brown, Igloo Regeneration
- Jon Clarke, Centrus Advisors
- Lizzie Clifford, London Councils
- Richard Cook, Lend Lease
- Jennie Coombs, LB Barking & Dagenham
- Judith Damerell, Lewis Silkin
- Sue Foster OBE, LB Lambeth
- Jane Groom, London Communications Agency
- Kate Davies, Notting Hill
- Pat Hayes, LB Ealing
- Katharine Hibbert, Dotdotdot Property Guardians
- Michael Hill, Countryside
- Gerry Hughes, GVA
- John Hughes, Notting Hill
- Neal Hunt, Poplar HARCA
- David Jowsey, TfL
- Esther Kurland, Director, UDL
- John Lumley, LB Hackney
- David Lunts, GLA
- Julia Moulder, Catalyst
- Alison Murray, GLA
- Stewart Murray, GLA
- Lucy Owen, GLA
- Stephen Platts, LB Southwark
- Brian Quinn, Cabe at the Design Council
- Peter Quinn, Lovell
- Andrew Sivess, LB Barking & Dagenham
- Dhruv Sookhoo, Home Group
- Lisa Taylor, Future of London
- Tom Titherington, Catalyst
- Marco Torquati, City of Westminster

### New London Architecture

NLA is an independent forum for debate about the future shape of the city and a permanent information resource about what's happening in architecture, planning, development and construction across the capital.

Web: [newlondonarchitecture.org](http://newlondonarchitecture.org)

### Event details

*Estate Regeneration: How local authorities are responding*, 11 Nov 2014.

Sponsored by Tibbalds.

### Event contributors:

- Andrew Beharrell, Pollard Thomas Edwards
- Jeremy Grint, LB Barking & Dagenham
- Pat Hayes, LB Ealing
- Eoin Keating, Jestico + Whiles
- Richard Lavington, Maccreeanor Lavington
- Stephen McDonald, LB Barnet
- Pedro Roos, Paul Davis + Partners
- Tristan Samuels, City of Westminster
- Hilary Satchwell, Tibbalds
- Jed Young, LB Camden

### Urban Design London

UDL aims to help practitioners create and maintain well-designed, good quality places. They do this by offering training, advice, networking events, design surgeries and online resource.

Web: [urbandesignlondon.com](http://urbandesignlondon.com)

### Event details

*Housing Development: Local authorities doing it themselves*, 18 Nov 2014.

### Event contributors:

- David Baptiste, LB Ealing
- Melbourne Barrett, LB Hammersmith & Fulham
- Natalie Elphicke, Million Homes
- Beth Kay, LB Brent
- Cllr Richard Livingstone, LB Southwark
- John Lumley, LB Hackney
- Matthew McMillan, LB Croydon
- Emma Peters, Regenfirst
- Cllr Leo Pollak, LB Southwark
- Tristan Samuels, City of Westminster



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