

# BRIEFING

## REVISION OF THE LONDON PLAN



15 May 2009

### Proposals for the Mayor's revised London Plan

Last December the Mayor announced that he would undertake a complete review of the London Plan (the spatial plan for London) and outlined his ideas in the document entitled *Planning for a Better London*. The HBF responded to this, welcoming some aspects, but expressing concern over others. The Mayor has now published his initial proposals for the review, and this will form the basis of a formal consultation with the London Assembly and the Greater London Authority functional bodies, and subsequently with the public.

The document can be found at:

<http://www.london.gov.uk/mayor/publications/2009/05/london-plan-initial-proposals.jsp>

Initial views and comments are encouraged however and these should be sent to the GLA by 30 June.

The rest of this briefing provides a précis of the main issues insofar as they relate to housing.

#### **The Mayor's vision for 2031 (page 25)**

In brief these are:

Meeting the needs and challenges of economic and population growth;  
Creating an internationally competitive city;  
Accessible neighbourhoods;  
A city that delights the eye (good design; build; public realm, parks; heritage);  
A world leader in improving the environment (ambitious environmental and zero carbon targets);  
Effective transport system (Crossrail will be a strategic priority)

#### **Population and household trends (pages 11-25)**

The plan will address the period from 2008 to 2031. The best projections estimate that the population of London will grow from 7.56 million to 8.37-8.58 million by 2026. By 2031 London's population may be between 8.79 and 9.11 million.

Composition will change too. London will be younger than elsewhere in England and Wales. Consequently, there will be a need to plan for more schools.

The number of households will increase. There were 3.18 million households in 2007. This is likely to grow to:

- 3.33-3.37 million households by 2011
- 3.48-3.57 million households by 2016
- 3.67-3.75 million households by 2021
- 3.79-3.93 million households by 2026

By 2031 the number of households may be between 3.90 and 4.04 million.

The period to 2031 is likely to see a decrease in the number of married couples, but this will be more than offset by the number of cohabiting couples. There is likely to be a large increase in one-person households, particularly among middle-aged people, and an increase in lone parent and multi-adult households. Consequently there is a need to meet the housing needs of both families and single person households. As an aside it is interesting to note that the results of the GLA's recent Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) has been met with some disquiet by the London boroughs because of the evidence of the growth of single households (nearly 50% of all household formation), and consequently evidence of a sustained demand for apartments, when the boroughs would rather direct the emphasis towards building more affordable family homes.

### **Deprivation and housing (page 42)**

London is an expensive place to live. Those on lower incomes find it difficult to access housing driving a link between social housing supply and the concentration of deprivation in particular areas of the capital. This tendency will be addressed in the Mayor's draft London Housing Strategy which will explore measures such as increasing the proportion of intermediate housing to social rent. The HBF has been in discussion with the Mayor on this issue and has given its' in principle support in order to increase access to home ownership products.

### **Growth areas (page 28)**

No radical change in the spatial direction of development in London is proposed. The Mayor's iteration of the London Plan will continue to support the growth areas and growth corridors already designated by national Government, namely Thames Gateway and the London-Stansted-Cambridge-Peterborough corridor.

The Mayor will also continue to support those corridors of city-region significance: the Western Wedge and Thames Valley; the Wandle Valley-Gatwick Corridor; and the London-Luton-Bedford corridor.

The Mayor's resistance to Green Belt development stands.

### **Sub-regions (pages 28-29)**

The sub-regions identified in the 2004 London Plan will be dispensed with as they have provided ineffective for planning purposes, especially where this has obstructed cross boundary engagement and the allocation of resources. Slightly different groupings, however, have been identified and will be maintained primarily for monitoring and management purposes. There remains the possibility that these new sub-regions might be used as the basis for funding decisions and resource allocation by the GLA and its functional bodies.

### **Town centres (page 35)**

The schedule of town centres will be updated with a renewed emphasis on their role as locations for commercial development beyond the Central Activities Zone. This could translate into greater competition for land for housing.

### **Strategic and Other Industrial Locations (page 37)**

The emphasis on protecting Strategic and other important industrial sites will continue. This will be necessary to accommodate the capital's industrial needs, especially expanding sectors such as logistics. Consequently, it is expected that the rate of conversion of industrial land to other uses will decline in contrast to recent years.

### **Green infrastructure (page 39)**

Green space will be strongly protected. New development will need to incorporate green infrastructure that is "planned, located, designed and managed as part of the open space network." Quite what this means in practice is unclear but the GLA will produce generic policy advice.

### **Housing (pages 41-47)**

The GLA's recently completed SHMA indicates a need for 33,000 new homes per year – an increase of 2,500 on the current annual target to 2016. By way of comparison the NHPAU ranges indicate a range of between 34,000 (meeting minimum housing needs) and 43,000 (upper – the long term target to stabilise affordability).

The SHMA also suggests - and this is supported by the Mayor - adjusting the division between social and intermediate housing from the current split of 70/30 to 60/40. This will reflect a new emphasis in the new London Plan on the importance of providing a wider choice of homes for Londoners at prices they can afford. This will mean providing more intermediate homes as well as one family sized homes.

The SHMA in combination with the SHLAA will help identify new housing targets for London based on a collaborative dialogue with the boroughs (para. 108).

### **Affordable housing (pages 43-44)**

As stated previously, the Mayor remains committed to removing the mechanistic 50% affordable housing target. Instead the new London Plan will replace the percentage target with a numeric target which will be informed by the SHMA and the SHLAA and sub-regional and local assessments. This is necessary to ensure that targets are realistic and meet needs (para. 43).

The Mayor intends to continue to meet the target of providing 50,000 affordable homes (new and conversions) between 2008-2011 as set out in Ken Livingstone's previous London Housing Strategy. The target will be 'reviewed in light of available resources' (para. 114) although what is implied by this is unclear.

The viability of providing affordable housing, however, receives greater attention than before. As paragraph 114 states:

*"all new development will still be expected to provide the fullest amount of affordable housing based on what is financially viable. Proposals for individual schemes should be informed by rigorous development appraisals including the GLA's own industry-recognised affordable housing 'toolkit'."*

(para. 114).

### **Housing quality (pages 44-45)**

One of the greatest new challenges for the industry will be the Mayor's intention to increase internal space and introduce other design standards.

The Mayor intends to introduce minimum internal space standards, the greening of new homes, accessible housing and lifetime homes standards. External quality issues also need to be addressed to minimise crime and anti-social behaviour as well as maximising outdoor amenity space.

### **Densities (para. 119)**

Achieving the maximum density will no longer be the over-riding concern. The emphasis will be on ‘optimising’ rather than maximising housing densities across London to take account of development quality and context.

It is very unclear what is being proposed here. The current London density matrix was designed to reflect typical local densities and character. But it also increased densities considerably in those areas in the central activities zone in keeping with urban renaissance principles (concentrating housing in proximity to employment and transport). Those areas defined as urban and suburban zones, by contrast, were assigned progressively lower densities. This resulted in some pointed political squabbles in the inner-London boroughs as councillors fought to get assigned lower densities. This was especially the case in more affluent neighbourhoods as they tried to resist flattened schemes. For example, affluent Dulwich fought to be designated in the suburban rather than the urban zone and struck a deal with the Liberals of resolutely urban Rotherhithe, who also wanted to be defined within the suburban zone. The wording in the document implies that a more discretionary approach might be adopted, probably to take into account London’s finely grained social demographic, and the rule of thumb, broadly defined, density matrix zones abandoned.

### **Back gardens (para. 118)**

Greater recognition will be given to the role of gardens, especially back gardens, although no specific mention is made of a policy protecting back gardens from development as the Mayor had earlier intimated (para. 118).

### **Climate change mitigation (pages 55-56)**

The Mayor intends that the revised plan should set ‘challenging’ new targets to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and to promote a ‘balanced approach’ to encouraging sustainable energy in new development.

Policies seeking energy efficiency and conservation in the design of new buildings will be strengthened and decentralised energy ‘promoted’.

The document also includes the suggestion that the energy efficiency element of the programme for the Code for Sustainable Homes might be accelerated.

The Mayor has asked questions on page 59 regarding the clarity and achievability of these objectives. Greater clarity as to what might constitute a balanced approach would be welcome. Our greatest concern is that the housebuilding industry alone will be saddled with responsibility for meeting all these objectives.

### **Climate change adaptation (pages 56-57)**

The Mayor will seek to minimise overheating in buildings through the provision of more green space and greenery.

Polices to manage flood risk will be strengthened. SUDs will be promoted.

### **Waste (pages 57-58)**

A 'zero waste to landfill' aspiration is proposed.

### **Social infrastructure (pages 45-47)**

The Mayor will seek to bolster the importance of planning for social infrastructure. This will include securing space and provision for community facilities and will require new ways of delivering services, unlocking resources and aligning public sector investment programmes. While no specific mention is made of S106 or CIL contributions in this section, this is probably assumed. It is unclear, however, how this squares with the proposed policy to prioritise S106 or CIL obligations to support Crossrail (see below).

### **Priorities in Planning Obligations (pages 76-77)**

The Mayor intends to generate £200m through contributions from development towards Crossrail. If CIL happens, this will be the chief priority for London (para. 209-210).

Aside from this, the Mayor proposes prioritising planning obligations to address:

Affordable housing

Public transport but especially Crossrail

Tackling climate change

Learning and skills

Health facilities

Childcare facilities

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