

FINCH

# The London Plan and an office fantasy

As with any London Plan it's a curate's egg of a document says Paul Finch in a new regular column

During these strange times, you sometimes read something in an official document and assume you must be suffering from some sort of Lockdown Fever. You read it again and the words are exactly the same. You ask around and find that others are as baffled as you are. Maybe it isn't you after all. It is the document that is the problem.

This happened to me as I struggled through the newly published London Plan, whose long and fractious gestation has finally resulted in Mayor Kahn's strategy being delivered. Midwife Robert Jenrick was about as ungracious as it is possible to be about the new arrival. In effect he has described the housing policies and targets in the plan as not fit for purpose, inadequate in terms of ambition and flawed in respect of proposed delivery.

In a letter to the mayor, Jenrick also claimed: 'Your Plan added layers of complexity that will make development more difficult unnecessarily; with policies on things as small as bed linen. Prescription to this degree makes the planning process more cumbersome and difficult to navigate; in turn meaning less developments come forward and those that do progress slowly. One may have sympathy with some of individual policies in your Plan, but in aggregate this approach is inconsistent with the pro-development stance we should be taking and ultimately only serves to make Londoners worse off.'

Ouch! However, one can take this with a pinch of salt, if not a bucket-load. Trying to pin blame on the latest London Plan for a collective failure over the past 40 years is not reasonable, though the central thrust of the Khan strategy, that the private

sector can or indeed should provide our social housing looks doomed to failure on the basis of recent experience.

But it was not housing policies which caused me to blink with astonishment – it was a phrase in Policy E1 Offices. This is what it says:

'The unique agglomerations and dynamic clusters of world city businesses and other specialist functions of the central London office market, including the CAZ, NIOD (Northern Isle of Dogs) and other nationally-significant office locations (such as Tech City and Kensington & Chelsea), should be developed and promoted.'

## Kensington & Chelsea? Is that wonderful Royal borough really a nationally significant office location?

What? Kensington & Chelsea? Is that wonderful Royal borough really a nationally significant office location? Just where exactly are the secret offices that give rise to this extraordinary description? King's Road? Knightsbridge? Kensington High Street? This is so weird that it makes you wonder about almost anything the Plan says.

The Plan's section on Design is considerably more convincing, acknowledging implicitly that planning is there to hold a balance between conflicting demands, and explicitly in declaring that 'not all elements of a place are special and valued'. This is in the context of a line of thinking prompted by Historic England, and made explicit in stud-

Paul Finch is programme director of the World Festival of Architecture and joint publishing editor of *Planning in London*



ies published by Allies & Morrison Urban Practitioners, analysing local character and density which should then inform any development proposal. There is a hint that nice areas could get a boost to remaining nice, while dense areas will be intensified. Let's see.

Boroughs are told they should identify sites for extensive, moderate or limited growth, echoing the principles of the recent planning White Paper. Proactive identification of sites suitable for tall buildings is advocated, those buildings to show an exemplary standard of architecture and materials – a requirement that no London mayor so far has done anything to enforce.

There is plenty of motherhood and apple pie advice, including a demand for more drinking fountains, and 'reducing opportunities for terrorism' whatever that means. The car is treated as an evil throughout the document. Minimum rooms sizes for new homes are treated as desirable maximums elsewhere.

So, as with any London Plan, a curate's egg of a document. I am still puzzling over the Kensington & Chelsea office reference. Did they mix up K&C with KC – King's Cross? ■

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# Design codes aren't being written for designers

>>> On a second reading, it may be that my expectations of the document, that it is trying to indicate to designers a way forward, is over-optimistic says Paul Finch

There is an ever-present tendency of planners and regulatory types to assume that they have a unique understanding of the world of creative design which is not available to actual designers. I thus read all official advice on design in that light – that is to say with extreme scepticism.

It often seems that Whitehall advice is irrelevant to people who can actually design, and thus can only be aimed at people who can't. The latter include about 99.9 per cent of the state officials responsible for architecture in the department which, these days, is called 'Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government'. Do any of them have a design qualification? Answers on a (small) postcard.

Following publication of the semi-literate National Design Guide, one of whose characteristics is a tin-ear for language, and another an inability to understand the difference between singular and plural verbs, we are now invited to comment on the National Model Design Code. Happily, this contains rich pickings for anyone interested in examples of motherhood and apple pie masquerading as design wisdom – plus the bonus of statements of the blindingly obvious.

Interest in clarity can be assessed in the following early paragraph:

'The National Model Design Code forms part of the government's planning practice guidance and should be read as part of the National Design Guide, and alongside the planning practice guidance notes referenced in Part 3 of the National Design Guide, Manual for Streets, and other forthcoming guidance relating to the natural and environmental characteristics of development. This guidance is not a statement of national policy, however, the government recommends that the advice in this guidance on how to prepare design codes and guides is to be followed.'

The drafters ignored the need for a semi-colon after the word 'policy', but that was probably too much to expect.

If drafting was the problem, not much of one, you may say. But how about this, as an example of why consultation is a waste of time: 'When preparing design codes and guides, communities need to be involved at each stage of the process in order to gain measurable community support that is appropriate

for the scale and location of new development. This will address the ambition in a new planning system to bring democracy forward so that communities decide what good design means locally and that this is enshrined in design codes and guides.'

'Bringing democracy forward' – what a fabulous clarion call for the localism which has been thoroughly trodden on in the recent planning White Paper, which demands the identification of sites for major, moderate or scarcely-ever development. If the 'community' doesn't want any development in its area, it can get lost. Or at least unless it is a nice Tory outer suburb, or shire location, where the existing 'community' can pull the ladder up, having bought into what previous generations built.

Incidentally, the code includes the unintentionally hilarious diagram which outlines what are described as the 'characteristics of well-designed places'. In an irony-free document of this sort, you don't expect (and don't get) any suggestion that a 'place' could be thoroughly agreeable without having been 'designed' according to straitjacket rules, laid down by state apparatchiks unlikely ever to have created any sort of place, well designed or not. These folk are, however, very good at producing analysis, charts and funny

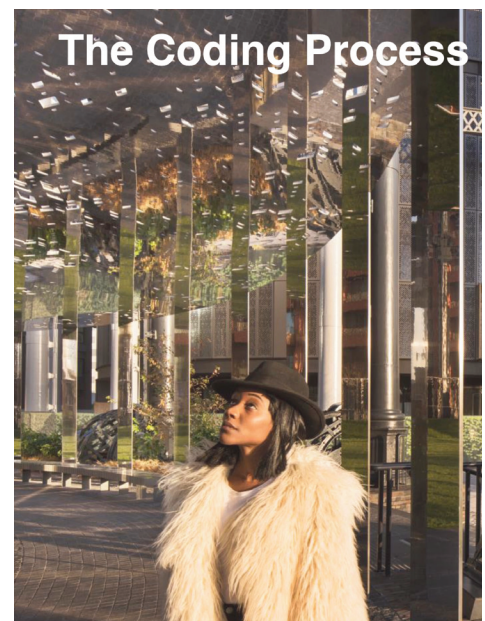
**The new National Design Guide reads more and more like a primer for planners bereft of knowledge about design or urbanism. That won't stop them telling designers their business**

maps telling you the difference between a neighbourhood and a city.

What happens when they try to address what might actually happen?

'Local planning authorities may wish to create a vision statement which sets out the specific aims for the design code. These visions need to be aspirational and set the context for the subsequent development of the code covering:

- An appreciation of the existing area or site, its



natural, topographical, historical and heritage features.

- Its character and appearance.
- The mix of uses and facilities.
- The amount and character of green space.
- The way in which it deals with traffic, parking, walking and cycling.
- Sustainability including energy efficiency'

This appears to suggest that 'vision' equals 'heritage'.

On a second reading, it may be that my expectations of the document, that it is trying to indicate to designers a way forward, is over-optimistic. Actually it reads more and more like a primer for planners bereft of knowledge about design or urbanism. That won't stop them telling designers their business.

Revealingly, the only significant illustration of a member of the public in the entire document comprises a chic black woman in a Trilby-style hat and fluffy coat, staring into space against a background of high-tech steel columns, with no suggestion about the 'place' where the hopeless photograph was taken. What did she do to deserve this? And has wokery arrived at MHCLG? ■

*Paul Finch followed Sir Stuart Lipton as chairman of CABE - the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment*



# The Diocese of London is looking at how to use its land

The Diocese of London is putting together a housing policy, getting local parishes involved in housing need and using its voice to campaign on the housing crisis in the city. Charlie Arbuthnot explains

"I hope that all parties will be able to commit to the clarion call from the Church of England" – so said Lord Blunkett in his speech to the House of Lords last month, referring to the Report of the Archbishops' Commission on Housing, Church and Community.

What is that "clarion call", has it been heard and how might it apply to London?

The most obvious part of that call is for a coherent, long term housing strategy backed by all parties. This has been missing for decades. Such a strategy, covering especially the number of homes needed, the number (and definition) of affordable homes and, indeed, a vision of what a good home is and how we make that the norm, can only be set by Government.

In the health sector, we know exactly what we aim to achieve - the highest possible standard of care for all, regardless of status. Archbishop Justin summed up the Commission's five values for homes – "sustainable, safe, stable, sociable and satisfying" - by suggesting that the equivalent goal for housing should be "good homes, affordable for all".

What was striking in the debate was that no one challenged the view that there are 8m people currently living in unaffordable, insecure or unsuitable homes nor did anyone question that this was 'a national scandal'. No one suggested that homes are actually affordable. Positively, almost everyone agreed that a long term strategy was needed from Government - and the opposition parties pledged to work to deliver that. The goal of "good homes, affordable for all" was widely agreed. So we have our target – and we have our opportunity to create a legacy for years to come.

But the Report is not just a call for action from Government – quite the reverse. It sets out clearly how we can all contribute. The Report was deliberately sub-titled "Tackling the Housing Crisis Together". Many reports have laid the problem solely at the doors of No 10 and seen housing as "their problem". We suggest that "together" we can solve it. All players, from

all backgrounds, each playing our part to see all communities transformed.

So how have others responded?

The housing industry has been overwhelmingly positive, congratulating the church on leading the way. One major house builder has welcomed the five values and also warmly endorsed our sixth "S" – Sacrifice. This last year, we have all learned to sacrifice for the common good. Could this become the approach in our housing sector? As Lord Crisp said in his speech, "It is wonderful to see the Church leading by example... Which other major landowners could be persuaded to do the same?"

And how has the Church reacted? We have received a steady flow of calls from churches and dioceses asking how they can play their part. Social media too has been enormously positive – no challenges this time as to why the Church was "getting involved in politics".

And what of London? Is everyone heading for the country and has that resolved London's housing crisis? If I was to take you to the scene of our first study visit, in Newham, it would be clear that we need something more fundamental than even 100,000 people leaving London if we are to address the crisis.

The crisis falls into two main parts and, in both, London could lead the way.

First, existing homes, where a key issue is an imbalance of power between landlord and tenant. The Report calls for a duty of care on landlords, the end of no fault eviction, clear access to an ombudsman etc. These issues could, of course, be solved if all landlords committed to provide 'sustainable, safe, stable, sociable and satisfying' accommodation. But they could also be resolved very simply and locally if landlord licensing was given teeth. Laws without consequences are merely advice - and licencing without appropriate penalties is of limited benefit. What if landlords that consistently violated these five values were barred

Charlie Arbuthnot chaired the Archbishop's Commission on Housing, Church and Community



from acting as landlords?

And, secondly, new build, where London has an exciting opportunity. The Mayor has a target of 50 per cent affordable housing for new planning consents. It is currently at 37 per cent and moving upwards. It aims to create affordable housing with rents related to income. It is endeavouring to grapple with the particular seriousness of affordability in London. This aligns completely with the Report.

The Report suggests that existing planning regulations can be used, over time, to drive affordable proportions up and to restore the word 'affordability' to its normal English usage. This would be done by making planning explicitly conditional on defined levels of affordability, thus lowering the value of the underlying land. On the ground, the Mayor is finding that this works.

And what is the Diocese of London doing? It is putting together a housing policy, looking at how to use its land both at Diocese and parish level, getting local parishes involved in housing need and using its voice to campaign on the housing crisis in the city. Might the Diocese and the Mayor's office jointly fund the use of the Report's "Good Steward Mapping Tool", created with Knight Frank, to audit church land and see where the opportunities lie? A meeting between the Mayor's housing team and the Diocese of London's property team suggests an exciting collaboration could be afoot. ■

*Charlie Arbuthnot worked in investment banking in the City from 1978 until 2008, subsequently running his own business advising the housing association sector on funding issues. He also sat on the main board of The Housing Finance Corporation (2008-2018). His pro bono roles include work with the London Borough of Wandsworth on faith and community, hate crime and elderly outreach and chairing his church's strategy team. He has chaired the Archbishop's Commission on Housing, Church and Community for the last two years.*

## THINKING ANGLICANS

Archbishops' Commission on Housing, Church and Community





# Transport hubs as destinations

**The focus on investment in London's transport network must include the opportunities that hubs that access that network provide in creating local facilities and vibrant communities, says Jonathan Plant**

Over the last 12 months, Lipton Plant Architects have been considering the changing rhythm of cities and how a new way of working, that is likely to result for many, in a hybrid style of working between home and the office will change how we view, move around and inhabit our cities. In particular and related to the work we are doing with Transport for London, we have been defining how transport hubs can not only bring new life and reinvigorate town centres, but also become destinations in themselves.

The typical experience of a tube or train station is a medley of the morning and evening rush-hour through the station, with just enough time to grab a coffee, dry-cleaning or some vital ingredients for a quick evening supper. But none of us have experienced that for at least 12 months, and it has given us some time to stop and reflect. With new working patterns, we have now realised the hours spent on commuting can be spent doing other things.

This moment of pause has also led many of us to think about how to move forward after current Covid-19 restrictions are lifted. The explosion in thinking over the last six months of the 'not very new idea' of the 15-minute city, has identified a growing desire for people to have many of their needs provided within a 15 or 20-minute walk or cycle of home. That includes shopping, entertainment, education, healthcare and wellbeing. And of

course, included within that now, and very much centre stage, is the ability to provide a place to work; that is not necessarily home, but also is not the company HQ, some 30 - 60-minute commute away.

So, if these new and developing transport hubs are to become destinations in themselves, what do they need to provide? Programmatically these new stations and hubs will be designed to include facilities that may not have previously been associated with a typical London tube station. A sense of transience and movement will be replaced with a sense of permanence. Coffee kiosks can be replaced with permanent cafes, for example. To become a destination, they need to provide a reason to stay or dwell, areas to meet, socialise, relax, play and work.

But beyond the physical there is the ephemeral, the less easy to facilitate reasons why these hubs are important; the ability of these hubs to provide the focus of a community. The ability to form social connections is vital and underpins the needs of communities who now relish 'local' and are actively engaging with their local communities. Transport hubs are obvious focal points that can be used to either build or bolster resilient and vibrant communities.

Connected with this is the need for these hubs to change and adapt to growing and more defined local communities. London's tube network for

Jonathan Plant is managing director, Lipton Plant architects



example, creates an enormous ability for mobility. That mobility comes with the speed and frequency with which the London tube and rail network can transport you around the Capital. It allows communities to push outward from central business districts and places of work.

But instead of providing ever increasing mobility and the spread of the 'commutable' umbrella of London, the focus of these transport hubs can change, from just the ability to get you from A – B as quickly as possible, to destinations that provide access. The ability to access anywhere in the Capital, through a vast network of interconnected nodes. Access to your community and the facilities, social networks and rewards of your local area. Access will be key, not mobility.

And with this change in focus comes the change in the rhythm of the city, the move away from a wave in and a second wave out of the centre. Time saved on commuting every day, can be spent investing in your local community where the transport hub is a focus and in many cases an opportunity to invest and create better town centres, squares and plazas. Places to live, work and play. Money is invested locally and with that comes further investment, local engagement and a stronger community. We will spend more time in our communities, get to know the people who make up our communities and then relish the opportunity to travel when needed.

Continued investment in London's transport network is vital to provide access to a highly connected city. But the focus must not just be on a factor of minutes from central London, but on the opportunities that transport hubs that access that network can provide in creating local facilities and vibrant communities, that reflect and reinforce our ability to be as local as we are London centric. ■





# A design-led approach in the new London Plan

The Plan will help learn lessons from Covid-19, featuring policies aimed at improving space and quality standards for new-build properties, says Lizzie Le Mare

The London Plan's formal adoption at the start of last month gives developers the certainty they need to fully understand the core aims of London's new development strategy and move forward on a number of projects across the capital.

By working within an adopted framework to deliver local agendas there is a clear way forward out of the three-pronged crisis we currently face – recovery from the coronavirus pandemic, solving the city's affordable housing shortage, and responding to the climate emergency.

The heart of the Plan focuses on addressing the housing crisis and delivering new homes – in particular, affordable homes in the context of 'good growth'. Much of the debate between the Secretary of State (SoS) and the Mayor in finalising the published version focused on housing numbers and ensuring that the Plan will meet London's full housing need. This is a point on which the SoS and the Mayor clearly still disagree, with the SoS concluding that 'you still have a very long way to go to meet London's full housing need'. However, in considering the delivery of housing it is important not to think in sheer quantity, but also to think of the importance of quality and the role that good design has in delivering successful places.

Large swathes of housing stock are now subject to regeneration and refurbishment because they were built quickly due to pressure to house people in great need. We need to ensure that in this current housing crisis we are building good quality, well designed places where people want to live and work that will last.

The new Plan sets out some good groundwork in terms of delivering 'good places', with policies that promote a design led approach to optimising site capacity as a good starting point. Moving away from the application of blanket density ranges based on public transport accessibility will help to promote more distinctive and innovative design centred around local needs. Acknowledging that all places have unique characteristics that need to be considered in development proposals is crucial and a welcoming feature of the new Plan. The difficulty will come in the ability of planning authorities to assess what 'good design' is and ensure that a more objective view on site capacity does not lead to prolonged

and lengthy discussions when dealing with applications.

Meanwhile, an area of conflict that could potentially flare up is the tug between policies on estate regeneration and those covering zero carbon and the circular economy – with new sustainability policies making it much harder to demolish existing buildings. Energy and sustainability are just one of many considerations alongside the existing character and quality of an estate, the views of local residents and any wider regeneration objectives.

One aspect that may help to achieve an understanding of what an appropriate site capacity would be is the publication of guidance on this matter. Consultation has recently closed on a supplementary guidance document, 'Good Quality Homes for All Londoners' which will help interpret and implement the Plan's policies on housing design, optimising site capacity and enabling housing supply through small site developments, with the wider purpose of sup-

Lizzie Le Mare is associate director, Tibbalds Planning and Urban Design



porting good growth. The document sets out guidance to cover design and quality issues at a number of scales - from establishing if a site is suitable for development, to a design-led approach to capacity, down to housing design standards that will ensure the internal environment of new homes is well thought out and supports the way in which people want to live.

At the same time, a point of contention in drawing up these plans was the definition of tall buildings. The Secretary of State had insisted the plan be modified so that where there was no borough level definition for 'tall', it was automatically set at anything over six storeys or 18m. This had previously been set at 25m in the Thames Policy Area and 30m elsewhere in London. By lowering the height of what is deemed 'tall' it means a more cautious approach could be taken restricting opportunities for innovation.

This point illustrates some of the tension that has occurred in agreeing the final Plan, on one hand, great emphasis has been placed on achieving housing targets but on the other some modifications can be seen to be reducing the ambition of the Plan itself.

The pressures for new good quality homes, schools, hospitals and places of work will inevitably mean fewer opportunities to create more traditional parks and nature reserves too. The urban greening and healthy streets policies in the Plan will be vital therefore in ensuring a healthier, happier and more sustainable future for London.

Finally, the Plan will help learn lessons from Covid-19, featuring policies aimed at improving space and quality standards for new-build properties, tackling poor air quality, and ensuring all residents and workers have access to open green spaces. It also steers us on a path towards tackling the climate crisis, with the goal of making London a zero-carbon city by 2030. ■





# 'Make no small plans'

The Plan "must deal only with matters which are of strategic importance to Greater London", Simon Ricketts reminds us

Surely planning becomes a democratic irrelevance when the plan making process is slower than the electoral cycle? That's pretty much the position in London. After all, Sadiq Khan wouldn't have managed it if he hadn't been gifted a further year in post by virtue of the postponement of the May 2020 elections.

Election: 7 May 2016. First consultation document: October 2016. Adopted plan 2 March 2021.

But it doesn't have to be that way. In fact, it shouldn't be this way. The plan "must deal only with matters which are of strategic importance to Greater London" (section 334(5), Greater London Authority Act 1999).

My 23 April 2017 blog post *Make No Little Plans: The London Plan heralded the imminent publication of initial non-statutory consultation in relation to the new London Plan. The hope at that stage was to have an adopted plan in place by Autumn 2019. I referred to the 400 pages or so of the then current plan and expressed the hope that its replacement would be shorter. Hmm, not so.*

One of the issues with this process has certainly been of the Mayor's making - the sheer bloated nature of the plan, with its excessive layers of detail. What can be done to make sure that this never happens again?

But the other issue has not entirely been of the Mayor's making. For the whole of his period in office he has faced opposition from Government, which has been placing pressure on him to increase planned housing numbers well beyond the already ambitious and probably unachievable numbers that he has been planning for. See for instance the previous Secretary of State's 27 July 2018 letter and Robert Jenrick's 13 March 2020 letter directing that a series of amendments be made to the draft plan.

"I had expected you to set the framework for a step change in housing delivery, paving the way for further increases given the next London Plan will need to assess housing need by using the Local Housing Need methodology. This has not materialised, as you have not taken the tough choices necessary to bring enough land into the system to build the homes needed.

Having considered your Plan at length my con-

clusion is that the necessary decisions to bring more land into the planning system have not been taken, the added complexity will reduce appetite for development further and slow down the system, and throughout the Plan you have directly contradicted national policy. As you know, by law you must have regard to the need for your strategies to be consistent with national policies.

For these reasons I am left with no choice but to exercise my powers to direct changes.

Your Plan must be brought to the minimum level I would expect to deliver the homes to start serving Londoners in the way they deserve. However, this must be the baseline and given this, I ask that you start considering the next London Plan immediately and how this will meet the higher level and broader housing needs of London."

Then most recently, only after the Mayor had chased on 9 December 2020 for a response from Government to his April 2020 proposed amendments to address those March 2020 directions, the Secretary of State wrote again on 10 December 2020 with further directions.

But, to accentuate the positive, we now have an adopted new London Plan (542 pages of it).

Here is a good Lichfields blog post on it - <https://tinyurl.com/xy9a4sav>. I did also like this Tom Pemberton post that summarised some of its implications in seven slides and here: <https://tinyurl.com/usc9m57v>

The whole process will now have to start again, as soon as we are past the 6 May elections, given the Government's expectation of an immediate review to take into account the current NPPF and the housing numbers deriving from the revised standard method (including indeed its additional 35% figure for London and other major towns and cities). The new numbers are truly challenging/unrealistic (93,500 per annum as against the 52,000 figure in the new plan and annual delivery of less than 37,000).

What a political dilemma for the next Mayor to face - to broker some sort of solution with Government, boroughs, communities, authorities surrounding London and, for so long as there are going to be the range of onerous requirements that

Simon Ricketts is a partner with Town Legal LLP  
From Simon's blog at [simoncity.com/author/simoncity/](https://simoncity.com/author/simoncity/)  
Personal views, et cetera



are set out in the new plan, developers and funders. On top of all the other challenges post-pandemic, post-Brexit and in the midst of a climate emergency.

And yet numerous candidates have thrown their hats in the ring for 6 May 2021 and we haven't yet reached the 30 March deadline for delivery of nomination papers (fancy a go?).

In preparation I did a little googling to see what the main candidates might be saying that might give some hope that the scale of the challenges ahead are publicly acknowledged.

- *Sadiq Khan's campaign was launched on 4 March, focusing on listing the achievements of his first term rather than setting out any significant new direction or pledges.*
- *Conservative candidate Shaun Bailey's campaign website - 100,000 shared ownership homes to be sold at £100,000 each - a London Infrastructure Fund to fund long-term transport projects.*
- *Green Party candidate Sian Berry's campaign website would set up "a People's Land Commission to find small sites for new homes, green spaces and community support". "In addition to using existing powers including compulsory purchase orders, I will also continue to lobby central Government for a devolved or national "community right to buy" which will create new rights for local community groups to buy any land or property that is neglected, empty and needed for community uses".*
- *"Liberal Democrat party candidate Luisa Porritt's campaign includes "homes in the heart of the city", "a green roadmap" and "reinvent the high street".*
- *Women's Equality Party candidate Mandu Reid: "Stand with us to make sure no woman is turned away from refuge, to close the pay gap in a generation, to balance work and family life for everyone, and to make London the first gender equal city in the world."*
- *UKIP candidate Peter Gammons will "will focus on new housing in every borough, holding developers accountable for providing affordable housing and prioritising Londoners." He has apparently written a book, "London - a road map for recovery", although I couldn't find it on Amazon.*

I think we need to get beyond these platitudes. ■







# Time to adapt and re-use

## Repurposing existing assets should be a focus for the next normal, say Jorge Beroiz and Federica Buricco

The pandemic has caused us to reassess ourselves, the lives we lead, and our impact on the world around us. Now, that introspective contemplation is filtering through to the urban realm. Now we are at an inflection point and can choose to build something better, more social, more soulful, and more regenerative.

As a reflection of a society and its values, neighbourhoods, and communities demonstrate the beauty of democracy in action. They reveal dysfunctional systems, implicit and explicit structures of power, and socio-economic disparities.

A path cleared by the pandemic shows that dynamic urban solutions, regenerative designs, and ecological systems are emerging. Bettering both our people and our planet, they bring forward self-sufficient cities that promote resilience.

Key to this is an investment in the upgrade of critical infrastructure, including housing, transit, water, energy, healthcare, smart city solutions, natural assets protection, and the reduction of our carbon footprint. While short-term the priority is economic recovery, these measures will enable more effective management of future situations, be they natural or biomedical. In the mid and long-term, the priorities will shift to protect and promote sustainable growth and opportunities for all.

Recovery will come with a levelling out of the economic base to allow for greater, more accessible job creation, education, healthcare, homeownership, mass transit, alternative modes of transportation, and environmental protection. In the year to come, definition around new metrics will help guide decision making toward these ambitions, with insights offered into the evolution of ecosystems and their interaction with people. From happiness to cleanliness, the built environment's success will be valued differently environmental and social performance muscles alongside along-side commercial.

### Sustainable urbanisation

It has been forecast that urban areas across the world will have expanded by more than 2.5 billion people by 2050. By 2119, it is only through re-establishing contact with the natural world, particularly trees, that cities will be able to function, be viable and support their populations.

"We should think of the city as a living organism – with its parks and green spaces acting as lungs that give it life, with Transit-Oriented Development (TOD)

serving as the connecting arteries" says Jorge Beroiz, director in CallisonRTKL's London office.

This model also sees all needs met within walking distance of public transport. Known as the '15-minute city', this brings a mix of residential, business, leisure, and open green space in closer proximity to cultivate thriving neighbourhoods with strong local identities. "It is about the right management and curation of spaces and places – we're planning and designing the hardware, while the software is the life and soul of the place" says Beroiz.

Appreciation for open space grew during the pandemic, with green areas becoming key to our well-being, and sense of self. Now, more than ever, accessible public open spaces are being considered essential infrastructure, where environmental benefits meet public health, ultimately creating places that allow us to come together as a community.

### ESG - making it measurable and investable

Investing in firms with a better record on social issues pays. Investment funds tracking the performance of companies with better ratings on ESG issues lost less money than those including worse performers in 94 per cent of cases during the crisis, according to an analysis by BlackRock, the US investment manager handling £5.3tn in assets at the end of March 2020.

Many are looking for guidance and support to achieve ESG aspirations, making assets "Paris proof," overriding short-term political and economic concerns. "If you focus on making a great place, something that helps people and has relevance and nuance, the rest of the mechanics become easier" says Federica Buricco, Associate at CallisonRTKL's London office.

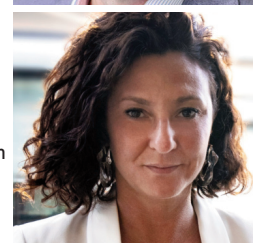
Federica adds: "We must also consider affordability, prioritising investment in basic infrastructure for lower and mid-income citizens, aligned with balanced mixed-tenure housing for all income levels to try and reduce social disparity."

### Mixed use and increased operational efficiency

Ensuring we have the right sustainable materials at our disposal is one thing, however "above all, we must consider the bigger picture and how new developments fit into their landscape. There is little point in creating ultra-sustainable buildings if everyone that uses them drives there in thirsty fuel-burning cars. As a result, the adoption of tran-



Jorge Beroiz [ABOVE] is director and Federica Buricco an associate with global architecture, design and planning firm CallisonRTKL



sit-oriented design, which seeks to maximise the mix of residential, business, and leisure space within short walking distance of public transport will be vital to the success of our places going forwards," says Jorge.

We must also rethink the historical nature of 'zoning' our cities. COVID-19 has shown that without the support of office worker communities, our financial districts suffer, as do all the periphery businesses – the market for shops, restaurants, and bars drops away. A more holistic, mixed-use approach to urban design would counteract this and lower the risk. In particular, creating a localised ecosystem that sustains itself and operates more like a circular economy should be the aim. Just as homes bring residents and hotels bring guests, each of these, in turn, provide a ready-made audience to surrounding amenities.

The blending of uses must also be central to future thinking. Buildings can and should have more than one use dependent on the time of day; a yoga studio during the morning, a café during the day, and an auditorium for performances at night. One asset, utilised flexibly, catering for a range of users. "The world is adapting to flexible ways of living and working, with the lines between all sectors blurring, as blended spaces become the norm and real estate transforms into a service industry that is more responsive and resilient" adds Federica.

Repurposing existing assets should be addressed for the next normal. With adaptive reuse, cities will work with what they have, complementing it with new buildings and structures as required, while not losing sight of our changing world and how we use our spaces today. That is how London and other key cities can ensure their sustainable future. ■

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# Redevelopment can reverse high street decline

**A new vision of the high street will deliver many benefits beyond the rejuvenation of our town centres, says Ritchie Clapson**

As online retailing has taken hold we've been left with redundant retail hubs in our town centres. According to Savills, around 12.5 per cent of retail premises in the UK are vacant, with 40 per cent of empty stores lying vacant for three years or more. Savills predict that retail vacancy will rise to 25 per cent by the end of the decade if no action is taken.

Yet, even though the majority of high street retail units are occupied, many now house charity shops, vape stores, and the like – a far cry from the diverse and bustling retail hubs that our high streets once were. And that's the best-case scenario. Many town centres have simply become ghettos, with an increase in both crime and poverty.

The general consensus is that our town centres are at a crisis point. Something has to be done to prevent further decline and, if possible, to turn high streets once again into places we want to visit. This means that buildings need to be repurposed.

## Redefining the high street

Essentially there are two reasons to go shopping: either you want to go, or you have to. Yet, with the rise of out-of-town retail and e-commerce, it seems unlikely that we'll ever have to regularly shop in the high street again.

Of course, there are some specialist businesses like estate agents, loan shops, opticians and dentists that still reside alongside the charity shops and vape stores. But, while these businesses may be necessary, they aren't going to draw large crowds of regular shoppers. People don't usually want to visit these businesses; they just have to on occasion.

So, the questions arise: what do we want our future high streets to look like? And how will this transformation be achieved?

Well, if retail is still to play a role, then in the absence of any need to shop in the high street, we need to create a place that shoppers want to visit. To recapture the thriving hub of activity, town centres need to become leisure destinations. They need to house restaurants, pubs and cafes, boutiques and other specialist retailers, cinemas, theatres, and sports and music venues, as well as gift and craft stores.

## Residential redevelopment is the key

While it may sound counter-intuitive, the secret to achieving this revitalisation of commerce, is to make town centres more residential. With more people living in town centres, there is automatically more demand not only for local services, cafes and eateries, but also for local convenience stores and entertainment.

People like living in towns that have a vibrant high street on the doorstep. So, the more residential property there is, the more independent retail there is, encouraging more residential, and so on. This could create a virtuous cycle that leads to the wider regeneration of the high street.

So, how do we achieve this transformation? We need to repurpose the existing buildings in our town centres to create the right balance of homes, workspaces, retail, leisure and services operating side-by-side. But the starting point has to be residential. Because by creating attractive homes in town centres, the demand for these other shops and services follows automatically.

Historically, this residential development has been difficult due to strict planning regulations. To turn a derelict department store into apartments, for example, would require planning permission from the local planning authority (LPA) department, which are usually notoriously underfunded, overloaded and often bureaucratic.

## Making redevelopment faster and easier

To speed the redevelopment process up, the government has created Permitted Development Rights (PDRs) which allow the use classes of certain types of building to change without the need for a full planning application. This makes the process much quicker and easier for developers to redevelop buildings as it reduces and sometimes removes altogether the risk of planning being refused.

In most cases, however, developers must still make an application, but the LPAs have far fewer criteria on which they can object and, in some cases, they have just 56 days in which to raise any objection.

Using the 'Class G' PDR, it's possible to convert



Ritchie Clapson is co-founder of propertyCEO

the floors above a shop to residential. Furthermore, 'Class M' PDR allows developers to convert the ground floor of shops up to 150m<sup>2</sup> that are not deemed 'prime retail' into residential property.

What else will help get these buildings turned into new homes? In December the government proposed that, from 1st August 2021, all buildings in Use Class E can be converted to residential using a brand new set of Permitted Development Rights. This is the final piece of the jigsaw puzzle which, if approved, will allow us to repurpose most of the buildings in our town centre without the need for planning permission.

## The wider benefits of revitalising our high streets

This new vision of the high street will deliver many benefits beyond the rejuvenation of our town centres. There is an acute housing shortage, and by turning existing unused buildings into homes, we're not only creating new homes, but we're also recycling our building stock and reducing the need to develop on green-belt land, thus helping preserve natural environments. ■

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## THE AUTHOR

Ritchie Clapson CEng MStructE is a veteran property developer of almost 40 years and co-founder of propertyCEO, a nationwide property development and training company that helps people create a successful property development business in their spare time. It makes use of students' existing life skills while teaching them the property, business, and mindset knowledge they need to undertake small scale developments successfully, with the emphasis on utilising existing permitted development rights to minimize risk and maximize returns.





# High streets need to rediscover their raison d'être

For our high streets to thrive, they need to rediscover their raison d'être, believes Daniel Abrahams

More than 17,500 chain stores and other venues across Britain closed their doors for good in 2020<sup>1</sup>. That averages to a rate of 48 closures a day. Among the high-profile casualties have been department store Debenhams and branches of John Lewis, as well as other high street staples such as Topshop and Dorothy Perkins. Understandably, some alarmed commentators have been ringing the high street's death knoll.

As a transactional property lawyer, people sometimes assume that ghoulish soundtrack has been a constant theme, during an undoubted period of transition and the impact of e-commerce. What I have seen play out over the two decades of my career has not been a slow death, but an ecosystem in flux and change, which the pandemic has significantly accelerated – as it has done in many other areas of our lives.

The high street has been, and now definitely is morphing into a multi-use hybrid, squeezing in retail, office and increasingly residential uses. Remember Woolworths? HMV? And the independent bookshops and grocers that were the backbones of our high streets? Just as many of these shops were swept away by demographic and behavioural trends, the high street is changing once more to suit the evolving needs and interests of consumers. For our high streets to thrive, they need to rediscover their raison d'être – and get comfortable with their own existence, having become pariah's in their localities, due to the comfort and ease of a home delivery.

What 2020 made clear is that the shop is no longer the most powerful asset in a retail brand's arsenal for survival. Physical retail is not a necessary

resource for retailers; that is now the internet. We saw this when ASOS and Boohoo found value in buying Arcadia Group brands for online commerce, but not their in-person stores. Lockdowns are teaching many retail sectors the same harsh lesson HMV learned in the advent of the digital media boom: retail space has limited value if you are not prepared to offer the public something they cannot get online. The physical space has become the showcase for the online sales, something landlords are keen to capture in the increasing popularity of turnover leases.

Thorntons closing all of its physical stores is a good illustration of this. For the last 10 years, Thorntons has been steadily reducing its physical retail presence, beginning with an announcement in 2011 that it would close 180 of the 364 stores it had at the time. Why? Because it was clear even 10 years ago customers were moving online, and Thorntons had not reinvented its stores quickly enough, to keep pace with cafes and other experiences to keep drawing in passing trade.

The pandemic has just accelerated plans that were already in the works. Unable to offer customers anything better than they could get online, Thorntons followed the consumer and shifted its focus to e-commerce operations; the same as many other consumer brands before them. While the announcement of Thorntons closing its final 61 stores this March might feel shocking and saddening for the impact the job losses will have, in terms of predictable trends, it is not unexpected.

As we look towards the potential reopening of non-essential shops on April 12, in order to survive,

Daniel Abrahams is a partner and co-head of real estate at City law firm Memery Crystal



the high street will need to find new purpose in becoming the latest arena for customer experience innovation. There are things people do not want to sit at home and wait for, and experiences they do not have the skill or time to create themselves – a quick round of indoor golf, or some axe throwing to alleviate the tedium of a wet week day! Retail owners of prime real estate need to make their business models capitalise on this. Give people a reason to go to the shops and they will do so. In my view, the leading options for businesses holding real estate post-Covid are experiential stores, such as hairdressers and coffee shops; presence-led retail; and feasible office spaces.

As an aside, I strongly believe we will continue to have a need and a desire for offices after the pandemic. Whilst there are untold numbers of contrasting views to pick from, we will not resolve the question of the ideal way of using the office until some normality has returned. When it does, and when we can tangibly remind ourselves how we feel about the commercial spaces we occupy, we will then decide what we want from them and how we will use them.

What is certain is that I am not alone in my vision of the office and retail hybrid model. The Marks & Spencer bosses are of a similar opinion, given the announcement of the redevelopment of their flagship Oxford Street store, converting the 10-storey building into a mix of office, retail, and leisure space. With such developments and customer experience innovations our high streets will become lively once more – not only because shoppers will return en masse, but because that will be the whole point of them. ■

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-56407155>

Daniel Abrahams is a Partner and co-head of Real Estate at City law firm Memery Crystal. He specialises in all aspects of commercial property, including property acquisitions and disposals, landlord and tenant, development schemes, lettings and pre-lettings.



# Lockdown blues?

**More of us will cycle or walk, the age of the private car is coming to an end, and because we will not all need to be in the same place at the same time public transport will be more enjoyable to use, and smart technologies will regulate its use thinks Mike Stiff**

This winter lockdown feels very different to the 2020 one last March, a mix of camaraderie and fear has been replaced with anger and boredom, instead of the warm sunny weather of April and May we have suffered a wet cold and grey January and February. In March last year we expected it to last 3 months, today, despite the vaccine, we really do not see an end in sight.

There is a growing realisation that things may have changed for ever, and that we will not return to the heady days of 2019. These changes are seismic, at an international level, globalisation is being questioned as localism starts to look more attractive. Nationally there has been a population shift, London alone has lost 700,000 citizens in the last six months, 8% of its population. Locally it is doubtful that our town centres and high streets will return to their pre-pandemic levels. Individually, we have got used to working from home, shopping online, home schooling and home delivery meals.

In many ways the pandemic has only hastened these trends, environmental concerns were already challenging the global economy, Brexit was hastening the return of migrant workers, our commercial centres were already responding to flexi-working, and the traditional high street retailers were struggling. Clearly structural change was underway, but as usual it was out pacing the best efforts of our local authorities. The pandemic has sharpened the minds of those that shape and plan our towns and cities. Central government has brought in changes to the Permitted Development rules that are intended to allow greater flexibility of use, and to return redundant space to beneficial occupation. There are big question marks over this policy, and it feels very heavy handed, taking policy and place shaping away from the local politicians and planners who understand the needs of the locals.

Environmentalists had been warning us all of the damage air travel does to our environment, (actually cruise ships are far worse than airplanes) but it is the pandemic that has ended International travel for most of us, it will be interesting to see if that returns to pre pandemic levels. The globalised

world feels a lot less attractive now, there is no doubt that we will be facing a future of mutating viruses, regular vaccinations, travel bans and lockdowns.

Against this rather gloomy backdrop there are a surprising number of positives to consider, for example the London development market, the future of retail and our work life balance.

The London construction industry is now busier than it was a year ago in March 2020 as residential and office developments forge ahead. The property market has not panicked, benefitting perhaps from the long-term view that developers and investors have fostered in order to navigate the markets.

Future developments will deliver healthier and greener buildings, secondary stock will be refurbished, which has the added benefit of a reduced carbon footprint. This market will be driven by the occupiers who in order to encourage their staff back will want to reside in much better quality buildings. The post covid office will be well ventilated with generous floor to ceiling heights, generous stairs and well planned spacious washrooms. Technology will reduce physical contact and employers will provide hotel style spaces where their people will want to meet and work as an alternative to the solitude of their spare rooms.

Coupled to this, tenants are looking beyond the office to the quality of the public realm. The reduction in car dominated roads and creation of cycle lanes that we have seen over the last few months has accelerated a move to pedestrian focussed public space, pocket parks, trees and pavement dining will result in cleaner air for all.

The office is not dead it is just going to be different. There is no doubt that retail has been severely shaken up, but many of those retailers were on the cusp of collapse, Arcadia is a good example, a company that did not keep pace with the digital revolution. The emerging high street landscape will be very different, shorter, more flexible and cheaper leases will encourage independents and creatives, high streets will become a lively mix of uses, they will be greener and cleaner and local once again. The 15-minute city will become reality.

Mike Stiff is a partner in architects Stiff + Trevillion

<https://www.stiffandtrevillion.com>



The rapid adoption of Zoom and Teams means that we can work remotely and we don't need to travel around the city, or indeed Europe, for meetings. There is no doubt that the value of face to face meetings and planning sessions has only been emphasised by the lockdown, but there are an awful lot of meetings that are actually better digitally. We will not need to commute at the same time, journeys can be staggered, and working at home some of the time can only be good for parents and carers.

So, despite the gloom that I am sure we all feel at times in this difficult period, I am optimistic that London will recover, and it will be a better, cleaner and greener city to live and work in. From the architectural profession's perspective I anticipate a boom later this year as the pent-up demand is released.

We must not miss this opportunity to rebuild our urban landscapes, we should look forward to ending the zoned city plan and the return of a proper mixed-use city with an emphasis on the quality of the public realm. Workplaces and homes will be better designed with access to private and shared amenity, families can live and raise their children with access to schools, doctors and shops all within walking distance.

More of us will cycle or walk, the age of the private car is coming to an end, and because we will not all need to be in the same place at the same time public transport will be more enjoyable to use, and smart technologies will regulate its use.

It would be great to think that this is all very achievable, as long as the balance of investment and taxation is maintained and the private and public sectors work together as partners, it may well be. ■

# The future of infrastructure

## The reality is that we are already on the cusp of flying cars, thinks Andrew Tetlow

Whenever the future of infrastructure is mentioned, my mind immediately brings up visions of the 1950s flying cars, but of course, infrastructure is much broader than personal transport and touches the lives of everybody from the moment they turn on the tap in the morning to make that essential cup of coffee, to jetting across the globe on holiday for that once in a lifetime adventure. It is a formidable topic to tackle in a short piece, so let us start by looking at how things might be in the short-term, post-COVID-19. The reality is that we are already on the cusp of flying cars. In January last year, Hyundai unveiled its electric vertical take-off and landing taxi in partnership with Uber, who have plans to invest \$1.5 billion over the next five years. The future has arrived, but I suspect it will take some time to roll out.

### Short Term (Post COVID-19)

Fewer people are travelling to work on their daily commute and fewer people travelling to attend face to face meetings, as well as ever-decreasing numbers of people physically going to shops. The exception to this rule is local shops, which have a new customer base courtesy of the many millions of more people that are now working from home every day. For residential areas, utilities (water, gas, electricity and telephone) had increased demand through the Co-Vid period which has been maintained, whereas the CBD (central business district) utility usage has decreased as offices remain open but with reduced numbers of staff. Homeowners have started to look more seriously at how they can reduce their energy expenditure, taking advantage of green grants and exploring the possibilities of home energy generation.

### Medium Term (by 2030)

In the short-term many office workers continue to have the flexibility to attend work on the weekdays they prefer, with Monday and Friday being least popular. Whilst in the medium term many companies take less office space and seek to stagger WFH (work from home) and WFO (work from office) days to maximise desk usage, reduce overcrowding on the travel networks and also counter the ghost town

effect that many offices suffer from on a Friday. The clogged road networks that were initially freed up by reduced demand for travelling to retail destinations and people WFH have become increasingly clogged by autonomous on-demand deliveries and taxis. Footpaths are used by autonomous robots for local deliveries such as medicines and small quantities of grocery shopping, which is a never-ending source of fun for children and the inebriated.

Car ownership has decreased as most residential roads have a selection of different autonomous electric vehicles to take people to their destinations. Because of a change in the law with a presumption of guilt towards motor vehicles in an accident with a bicycle, Londoner's psyche towards cycling changed from needing a specialist bike and lashings of Lycra to something similar to what you might expect to see in Holland, where on mass people hop on generic-looking bikes with whatever they are wearing and cycle along in a critical mass, to their destination. Wildflower verges often separate cyclists and other road users, acting like green arteries spreading out of the city whilst providing a varied and colourful environment for butterflies, bees and bats. Electric mini scooters became regulated and legal to use on our roads in 2022, providing many people with fast and cost-effective daily travel into and around the city, relieving more strain on the rush hour train network, however, their sometimes erratic movements cause chaos around autonomous vehicles.

Most houses have become mini power stations, generating their own electricity for use during the day for lighting, cooking, tech and heating, with excess energy being stored in batteries at the property for use at a later date, perhaps to charge a car or scooter, or sold back to the grid. Gas central heating was banned in 2025 in new build homes leading to a huge increase in air and ground source heat pumps and a subsequent drop in price for the technology.

### Long term (by 2050)

With the country now carbon neutral and veganism up at 30% of the population, the country looks and behaves very differently than it did in the 2020s. The hyperloop between London and Edinburgh started construction in 2045 (completing in 2050) cutting



Andrew Tetlow is director of architecture at mcm-uk

the journey time down from 4.5 hours to 30 minutes but this speedy form of transport is not yet for the masses. Think of it more like the concord of its day.

With advances in computing and internet technology, the journey to work and from work (for a lot of people) is not as we would have known it in the 2020s. After the pandemic, the global trend towards urbanisation slowed for the older and more established generations, who felt less of a need for the buzz that a big city like London offers and they wanted bigger properties and a better connection with nature. A trend that happened before the pandemic but was hugely accelerated by the technology that was piloted during the pandemic.

In 2030 the UK started converting its natural gas network to hydrogen, providing a zero-carbon alternative to buildings using heat pumps, (completed in 2045), allowing the use of adapted gas boilers and cooking equipment on the network with only water as a by-product. In 2035 the UK started to roll out fleets of hydrogen-powered trains for the non-electrified part of the network, as a replacement for diesel engines.

Individual buildings have been well insulated and powered by renewable energy for some time. The concentration in recent years has been around the reduction in water usage and recycling of water. Grey water is collected and reused on most buildings for flushing toilets and watering plants. We now live a life that is in harmony with nature. This is not a return to "The Good Life" but a partnership with the past and the future, which embraces technology where it can bring advantages to society and the environment. The future will be bright if we make it so.

Do not let today's actions destroy tomorrow! ■

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# New guidance on viability

## The new RICS guidance on viability, whilst too long, is welcomed by Pascal Levine

The RICS have published their long-awaited new guidance 'Assessing viability in planning under the National Planning Policy Framework 2019 for England'. The Guidance Note (GN), issued as good practice, whilst not mandatory for Surveyors, should be given significant weight in the determination of planning viability matters and practitioners should only depart from the advice, in exceptional circumstances. The GN should be considered alongside a range of other RICS publications including the 2019 Professional Statement, 'FVIP: Conduct and Reporting' and various valuation guidance and professional statements.

The new RICS GN, which will be effective from July 2021, ideally could be more concise. However, following a public consultation exercise last year, the RICS GN seeks to provide clarity for practitioners on the intent of national policy, whilst recognising a diverse set of stakeholders in the development process with differing priorities. The document replaces 2012 guidance, much of which became largely redundant in 2019 given changes to national planning policy and several high profile appeal cases.

Reflecting these policy changes, the RICS GN contains a distinct shift from an approach that, pre-2019, favoured landowners in some cases, to one that takes a tougher line particularly on landowner return, commonly referred to as Benchmark Land value, perhaps the most contentious issue of all.

There is no doubt that, as intended since 2019, this policy change has resulted in an adjustment in land prices albeit this is somewhat opaque given the other challenges the market has ensued in the same time period.

However, the delivery of obligations, most notably affordable housing is now more entrenched in the planning framework and subsequent buying process, than pre-2019. The implication of the policy change for land release however, particularly in the current environment, is unclear. The RICS GN highlights the need for an appropriate balance in accordance with policy.

The RICS GN reflects the NPPG requirements for an 'EUV plus' based approach as the primary approach to Landowner Return. The 'plus' element will likely remain a point of contention as stakeholders seek to navigate through the process, whilst seeking to maintain the appropriate balance between risk (profit), landowner return and obligations.

Where this equilibrium cannot be achieved, development will not be delivered particularly in a unprecedented market environment. On this matter, the RICS GN reflects the PPG intent that market risk is viewed as a component of developer return and warns against the use of adopting planning viability as a hedge against prevailing market headwinds.

The RICS GN provides clarity on the policy

Pascal Levine is a partner with DS2 LLP



requirement for greater emphasis on viability as part of the plan making process with site specific viability being an exception rather than the rule. The RICS GN places emphasis of the collation of appropriate evidence, when setting new policies, including recognising the cumulative impact of a range of additional policies (affordable workspace at the moment for example) and the imposition of CIL. As part of the emphasis on the adoption of Local Plans, strategic sites should be assessed carefully given their importance, and the RICS GN reminds stakeholders to engage in this process, so as to set the bar at a reasonable and achievable level. All too often, data for the strategic sites is not appropriate and this sets unrealistic expectations that then need to be negotiated as the site-specific level.

The 2012 RICS guidance has been out of date for some time and the new version, whilst too long, is welcomed and reflects the regulatory authorities' approach to the NPPG requirements, that practitioners should now attach significant weight to. ■



To celebrate architects and urban planners Metropolitan Workshop's 15th anniversary, we've invited thinkers and doers from the built environment to contribute to our new podcast series Reshaped. It features 15 ten-minute episodes filled with inspiration for making the post-pandemic world a better place.



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# In defence of the 'gig economy'

We should take a break from telling those to whom it is done what they should do, says Daniel Moylan

I have had a quiet lockdown. For many weeks outdoor exercise has been rationed. For me, at least, this has created a sense of anxiety that, by not taking up my ration, I may be missing out and as a result I have been daily pounding the lawns, hillocks and glades of Kensington Gardens and Hyde Park at, as it has turned out, one of the most glorious seasons of the year. On my way to the parks, I pass at the top of my road, the mooching motorcyclists who deliver takeaway food locally. These are people who might today scrape into the approved category of heroic key workers, but that was not true a few weeks ago.

Back then, when things were "normal", we regarded them as a rather annoying manifestation of what was contemptuously called the "gig economy".

We had only two ways of explaining these people: either they were being ruthlessly exploited, in which case they were to be pitied, or they were willing participants in the lowest form of economic organisation, in which case they were despicable. Our solution was simple: the law must force them to become subject to the infantilising web of employment legislation. We had no conception that they might prefer the freedom and autonomy of being in control of their own economic actions. They had to be told what to do.

The urge to regulate the messiness of urban life was identified by Jane Jacobs as the main threat to cities, those vast engines that delicately balance wealth-creation, community life and personal self-realisation. Jacobs' insight was that what looked like disorder was in fact a vastly complex and continuous web of human interactions beyond our ability to analyse. And what we could not analyse we mistook for messiness and set about eliminating. In city planning terms, that meant a rational re-making of the city: different places for different activities and uniformity within them, with models as various as Sir Ebenezer Howard's garden cities and Le Corbusier's Ville Contemporaine.

For Jacobs these were not paths to renewed cities but ways of destroying cities, by eliminating the complexity of human interaction that

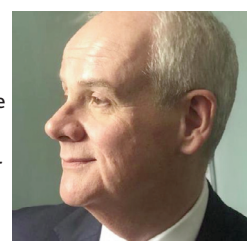
was crucial to the city's success. For a city to prosper, we needed to live with a degree of disorder.

We made some brave experiments in that direction under Boris Johnson, with streetscape re-modelled to remove signs and guardrail and with some tentative experiments in shared space, inspired by the work of the late Hans Monderman in the Netherlands. But the instinct to control was quick to re-assert itself and now we design our cities in response to barks and yelps from well organised single-issue lobby groups who are keen to allocate the city's spaces for the purposes they favour, usually with no better argument than that they are morally superior and deserving persons. And so we face demands for bicycle lanes here, bus lanes there, kerbs for guide dogs everywhere, all to be allocated top-down by highways engineers practising what remains one of the few professions still working to a Soviet model.

The lockdown has taken the bossy society to a new zenith. Even in the Second World War people weren't told when and whether they could sit in a park. Of course there has been a very strong justification for this: plague management is not new and for centuries it has included urban lockdowns, isolation of the infected and social distancing. It would be remiss of the government not to resort to those measures learnt from hard experience.



Lord Moylan, Conservative peer and former Deputy Chairman of Transport for London



But there are too many decision-makers relishing these new powers. Loath to let a good pandemic go to waste, they are emerging with plans for a radical re-shaping of the city's transport: more lanes for everyone! Some are indeed pondering a far less dense city – not a city at all, therefore. We see hints of a new, even fiercer obesity strategy. And of course we are to be shouted at by recorded warnings whenever we ride on a bus or a Tube. It's easy to believe that for these people the queue is the paradigmatic form of social organisation.

I am not sure anyone has asked the mooching motorcyclists whether these are their priorities.

The London Society is blessed to have so many educated contributors with bright ideas for the capital's future. I am no different – I have got the degree certificate to prove it – and I am greatly honoured to be invited to put down my thoughts as to how we might change London when the pandemic recedes.

So let me hark back to Lenin and Trotsky, who, with the ruthless insight that accompanied their ruthless brutality, gave us the question, "Who, whom?" Who will control whom? It was always a slogan to summarise class struggle but it is not without applicability to London today, for truly the capital is divided into those who do and those to whom it is done. My suggestion for change in London after the virus is that we, the educated doers, should celebrate the messy takeaway bikers as a freewheeling symbol of a city that has been a success for 2,000 years and take a break from telling those to whom it is done what they should do. ■

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