

Estate regeneration and affordability

London needs to build 65,000 homes a year and nearly half of these need to be genuinely affordable says Mariead Carroll

According to Crisis, councils across the country have spent £3.5 billion on temporary accommodation in the past five years. Almost two thirds of the £3.5 billion has been spent in the capital, with 10 London boroughs accounting for two thirds of the total increase in spending over the past four years. Just imagine how many lives could have been transformed if this money could have been used to build safe, secure, affordable, homes instead.

Across the capital, London had 243,668 people on social housing waiting lists in 2017. Seven London boroughs – Ealing, Greenwich, Hackney, Islington, Lambeth, Newham and Tower Hamlets – made up nearly half of London’s social housing waiting lists. The need to build more affordable housing is clear and was central in the last Mayoral election campaign, and is again a key issue for the three shortlisted Conservative candidates.

However we have a finite amount of land. With both regional and national government keen to protect the green belt and preserve land for industrial use we need to bold in our approach to how we use the land that we have.

Research has shown there is considerable theoretical potential to increase housing supply through the

regeneration of housing estates. One estimate suggests there are approximately 8,500 hectares of land covered by local authority and ex-local authority housing estates in London of which 1,750 hectares might be ‘capable of regeneration’. This could lead up to an additional 54,000 to 360,000 homes depending on the density of development.

Another estimate states that densification of large housing estates could provide an additional 80,000 to 160,000 homes in London (4,000 to 8,000 new homes a year). Of course, these broad-brush estimates have not looked at the particular circumstances of the individual estates; and it would be neither practicable nor desirable for all of London’s housing estates to be treated in the same way. It is undeniable that done well, estate regeneration can deliver much needed homes. However it should be ultimately down to local authorities and housing associations working in partnership with residents and the local community to assess this.

While it is true that estate regeneration can lead to new, much needed homes, it can also transform existing areas and homes in need of investment. Many of our large housing estates are no longer fit for purpose. They were built at a different time, to different standards and can be costly to maintain.

Effective resident engagement is essential to delivering estate regeneration and our report ‘Estate Regeneration: More and better homes for London’, published in 2017, sets out a number of case studies, from local authorities, housing associations, and private developers highlighting positive resident and community engagement practice.

Regenerating large estates can take a long time, sometimes anywhere between 10 to 20 years. A ballot can only gauge a moment in time and does not reflect that over the period of regeneration, the people living on the estate will change, local priorities will change, and the economic environment can change dramatically. All these changes could significantly impact on the viability of a scheme. Consequently, proposals made to residents need to be flexible enough to withstand a range of external factors so that should changes be required, those who are leading the development are able to respond to these.

With the introduction of ballots we see a one size

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fits all approach to consultation that does not take into consideration the requirements of individual estate residents and communities. Any decision relating to the use of ballots should rest with local authorities who are best placed to understand the specific concerns and interests of their local communities.

Local authorities should then be able to balance the use of ballots and other methods of engaging with existing residents and the wider local community with broader considerations such as: the economic and social benefits that estate regeneration may bring, for example jobs and training opportunities; benefits of an increase in the supply of homes, including affordable housing; and improvements to the health and wellbeing of residents living on the estate and in the wider community.

Estate regeneration is one way of creating new genuinely affordable homes. However, we have concerns that the Mayor’s approach to ballots will mean that some estates which desperately need to be regenerated and which could provide more new genuinely affordable housing will no longer happen. ■



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Estate regeneration ballots

Embracing a very necessary change (but make it timely) says Riëtte Oosthuizen

A resident ballot is now a requirement for every estate regeneration project that benefits from GLA funding. As from the 18th of July 2018, a positive residents' vote have become a prerequisite to development proposals progressing through to planning applications. In my view, this change is welcome, but the timing of the vote is critical.

The requirement for a resident ballot kicks in where social housing are to be demolished and replaced by 150 or more homes (of any tenure), on an existing social housing estate.

While ballots associated with estate regeneration are not an unknown thing – and in fact have been used in recent years on schemes we have been involved in - they are now unnegotiable if projects are eligible for GLA funding (which would include Recycled Capital Grant funding).

In our day to day work, we are already seeing the impact. Clients are being cautious and fees are split into a pre and post ballot phase; the pre-ballot work perceived as high risk. This caution is not unfounded: it is all too common for the voices of a few disgruntled and very vocal resident to sway views. There is substantial risk if the resident vote becomes the deciding factor on whether any new homes should be provided. For local authorities and Registered Providers who are keen to build social homes, estates are key assets for considering infill development or redevelopment.

Estate regeneration has had much bad press in the last 5 to 10 years. Projects have resulted in the

loss of affordable housing and the breakdown of community ties as people have been displaced. A radical step change is necessary, mostly to restore resident trust in the estate regeneration process. Residents have been given a lot of power to impact on the development process. To reach a 'yes' vote, thorough pre-ballot consultation would be essential. This is definitely the death knell for tick box consultation exercises.

As an organisation we fully support a process that puts residents' views central to estate regeneration. In 2016, HTA Design published 'Altered Estates' in conjunction with Levitt Bernstein,

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Pollard Thomas Edwards and PRP, which set out many years of combined experience of how to achieve successful estate regeneration; resident involvement and the carefully weighing up of all options being key.

We first became aware of the likely importance of the Mayor's Good Practice Guidance to Estate Regeneration 'Better Homes' more than a year ago when a GLA official told us they tended to keep the document close to hand in case they cross paths with the Mayor in City Hall. The criteria for estate regeneration posed by this document are already applied as critical success factors by GLA officials in the pre-application planning advice feedback of projects referable to the GLA.

The principles of this guidance include evidence of an increase in affordable housing or as a minimum like for like replacement, full rights to return or remain for social tenants, and a fair deal for leaseholders and freeholders. This guide established the foundations for resident ballots in estate regeneration.

Whilst we fully support ballots that are run fol-

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Andover Estate regeneration by HTA Design

Dr Riëtte Oosthuizen, planning partner, HTA Design LLP



lowing appropriate resident consultation, there is one area of concern: the current guidance expects a ballot to take place prior to the procurement of a development partner. This could have substantial implications for public sector bodies or housing associations who are looking at Joint Ventures to deliver expensive estate regeneration schemes. Huge upfront costs would have to be expended to work with residents over a period of time to come to an agreement as to whether estate regeneration would be supported. This would have to be accompanied by substantial amounts of design work – also tested to be viable and deliverable – in order to give residents enough information so they know what they vote for: not only in terms of their rights, but also what type of place would result. There is a problem in this: once development procurement partners are procured, there are often changes in design teams meaning a change of approach to design objectives. Would residents perceive this as a major change in approach and therefore promises not being met? The GLA holds the power to monitor progress according the original Landlord Offer and the ability as such to withdraw funding.

Working closer with all affected residents to reach a position where more affordable homes can be delivered and their needs being met is absolutely necessary to restore trust in estate regeneration. However, the ongoing Brexit debate makes it evident that binary yes/no voting does not make things straightforward. Timing is critical. There is risk in the expectation that a resident ballot should take place before a Joint Venture partner is appointed. Highly complex projects undergo many changes after Joint Venture partnerships are put in place, including changes in design approach.

We need to proceed with care. ■

