

# Designing for London

**Spencer de Grey considers what makes a city a successful, memorable or an appealing place to live.**



Spencer de Grey is senior partner, Foster + Partners

**What makes** a city successful, memorable or an appealing place to live? It is one where you can move from one place to another; where you have the ability to change confidently from metro system to bus and then walking; where there is space to breathe – chance discoveries and unexpected experiences; and where you enjoy a sense of community.

The most memorable spaces in a city are often the ones which break the rules. In developing a vision for London, therefore, it is essential that flexibility and a respect for the city's diversity are as hallowed as the attempt to make sense of the muddle and to create a kind of urban logic. London is a successful city – it is a commercial and cultural powerhouse. For example 63 of the 100 FTSE companies have their headquarters in London, £15 billion is generated by tourism per annum and there are 27 million overnight visitors and 976 million tube passengers per annum.

Equally, London is a potential model for sustainability, particularly because its density is high and it is relatively compact. There is a close relationship between density and energy consumption and while there are other important factors, such as accessibility and public transportation networks, it is the compact city that offers a lifeline to future sustainability.

### Villages/Sub-centres

On many levels, London works well. Physically, its historic legacy comprises a cluster of villages, which have evolved to become successful sub-centres with defined local communities. If you look at a map of London, it is obvious how graphically different it is from, say, Paris or New York. The structure of London, with its absence of grids and numerical references, is more organic. As its

population has grown the city has gradually enveloped surrounding towns and villages, each with its village green, common or heath. This emphasis on defined villages is reflected in London's public transport network. Destinations on the front of buses, and the names of many tube stations, give clues: Putney Common; Shepherd's Bush Green; or Hampstead Heath. The quality of civic space in these sub-centres varies greatly, however.. Duke of York Square, in Chelsea, is a good example, while Stockwell – in contrast - urgently needs attention. Both are five stops on the tube to Trafalgar Square.

The more successful sub-centres

are often characterised by their combination of good transport connections, excellent local facilities and inviting civic spaces. It is an effective urban diagram and very much a part of London's DNA. Ideally, these 'compact communities' include every amenity from a florist to a local school – all within walking distance.. As we have found – schools have the ability to lift the fortunes of their communities, providing a range of community facilities after school hours and improving the sense of civic pride. The recent controversy surrounding the future of Pimlico School shows just how focal schools can be to their local communities – the school



Villages/Sub-centres



Duke of York Square, Chelsea, left above and Stockwell, right.



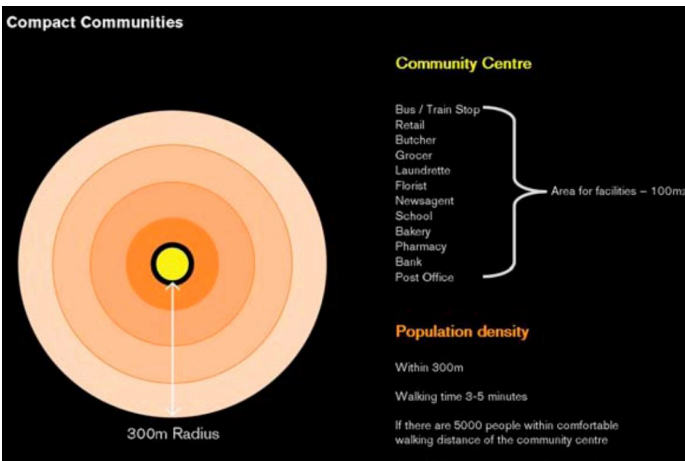
Successful City

should not be demolished.

When combined with higher density – especially around the individual transport nodes - the village diagram becomes not only historically apposite, but also sustainable. We have worked on a

number of studies and master planning exercises which have attempted to reinforce this strategy, creating vibrant, mixed-use, high-density communities in and around London's most vital transport hubs.

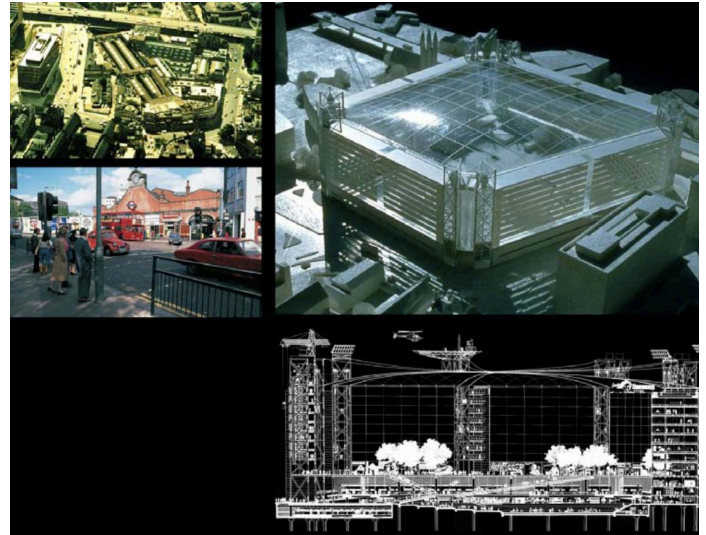
The project pictured right is for a



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Project for a transport interchange, office complex and public space in Hammersmith

transport interchange, office complex and public space in Hammersmith, West London, originated from London Transport's wish to renew the bus garage and station and create an integrated transport interchange subsidised by speculative office development. The proposal created wide, toplit pedes-

trian malls, entered at street level and running beneath the surrounding roads to provide access to the Underground station below or to the bus station, elevated three metres above ground level and linked to the road system by shallow ramps. Above all this was a public plaza, equal in size to Trafalgar Square but,



Early studies for the masterplan for the redevelopment of the Elephant & Castle also emphasises the importance of strengthening local centres.

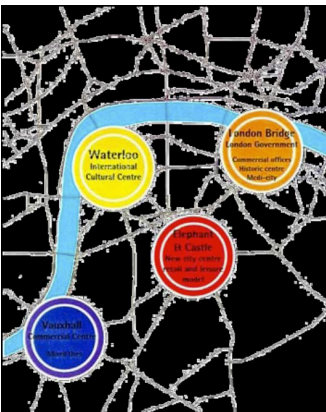




A transport and traffic hub, with roads radiating towards eight of London's bridges, the area is served by Thameslink and Underground lines and more than twenty bus routes



Located in a cluster with existing towers, two tall buildings will straddle the railway line, forming a gateway to the development and signalling the Elephant & Castle's position on the London skyline and reinforcing its status as one of London's prime sub-centres



A new transport interchange combines the Bakerloo and Northern Line stations with existing rail links and a new bus terminal

enclosed as it was by perimeter buildings, closer in spirit to one of London's garden squares. The whole space was enveloped by a canopy, developing ideas on covered public spaces that were later explored with the British Museum and Tower Place.

The scheme hinged on a triangle of forces: it had to sustain itself financially, work operationally as a transport interchange and create

something for the community. Whilst appointed by the local community, London Transport and their developers moved in new directions.

Early studies for the masterplan for the redevelopment of the Elephant & Castle also emphasises the importance of strengthening local centres. Covering 200 acres, this densely populated area occupies a strategic position between South London, the City and Westminster. It has always been a notoriously unfriendly place for pedestrians, who must negotiate a network of subways to cross the two busy traffic roundabouts that divide the area. The scheme proposed a cluster of tall buildings, linked to a public transport interchange, restoring public space to the community and banishing traffic from the site.

A transport and traffic hub, with roads radiating towards eight of London's bridges, the area is served by Thameslink and Underground lines and more than twenty bus routes. At its centre, in place of the shopping centre, is a new piazza

measuring 200 x 85 metres. One of the largest public squares in London, it is surrounded by trees, cafés, shops and housing. A new shopping centre, whose roof forms a park, will provide more than a million square feet of retail space. Other new community facilities include a theatre, swimming pool, fitness centre, library and early learning centre. And Heygate, one of Europe's worst housing estates, will be replaced with social housing on a more human scale.

Located in a cluster with existing towers, two tall buildings will straddle the railway line, forming a gateway to the development and signalling the Elephant & Castle's position on the London skyline and reinforcing its status as one of London's prime sub-centres. A new Transport Interchange combines the Bakerloo and Northern Line stations with existing rail links and a new bus terminal.

Of course, the success of London's sub-centres is highly dependent on the ability to move easily between them and to the city centre, itself. Hence reliance on

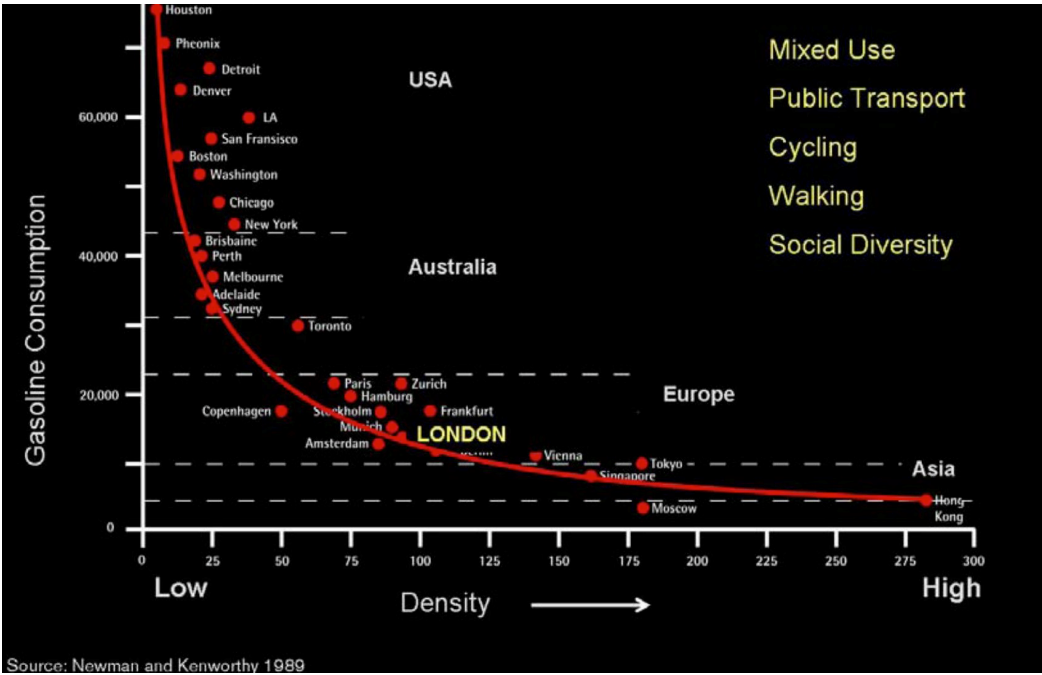
these transport nodes is absolute, and the higher the density around them, the more sustainable the city will become.

If we compare London to a number of cities across the world, the graph (*overpage*) shows the energy a city consumes, measured in terms of gasoline, of petrol against the increase in density. The high density cities, for example Hong Kong and Monaco, are very, very low in terms of their energy consumption. Interestingly, the cities that sprawl out, that produce endless roads and highways, whether Houston, Phoenix or Detroit, are very, very low density, but they consume enormous amounts of land, and consume a lot of energy.

For London, the problem of the existing housing stock must be balanced against innovations for new ways of living.

There are numerous examples of best practice in the design of offices – EDF in France and Centrica in Edinburgh are both models for efficient energy management.

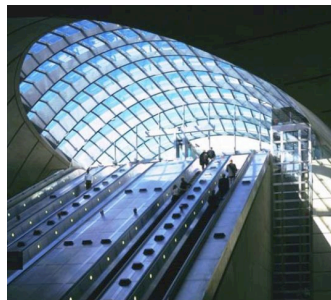
Transport is perhaps most perti-



Source: Newman and Kenworthy 1989

this graph shows the energy a city consumes, measured in terms of gasoline, of petrol against the increase in density

ment – realising a vision for a station or an airport is about considering the building itself as well as the wider infrastructure of which it is a part. The Jubilee Line extension was one of the greatest acts of British architectural patronage of recent years. It comprised eleven new stations by as many architects. The station at Canary Wharf is used by more people at peak times than Oxford Circus. The station is built within the hollow of the former West India Dock and at 300 metres in length is as long as Canary Wharf Tower is tall.



Canary Wharf Underground station and St Pancras International, both by Foster + Partners

At ground level, the entire roof of the station is laid out as a landscaped park, creating Canary Wharf's principal public recreation space; the only visible station elements are the swelling glass canopies that cover its three entrances and draw daylight deep into the station concourse.

Twenty banks of escalators trans-

port passengers in and out of the station, while administrative offices, kiosks and other amenities are sited along the flanks of the ticket hall, leaving the main concourse free and creating a sense of clarity and calm. Due to the high volume of station traffic, the guiding principles in the building's design were durability and ease of maintenance.

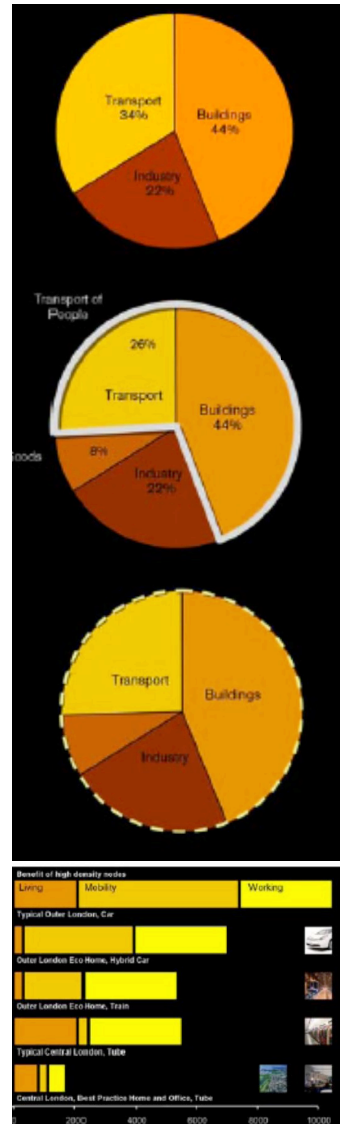
If transport within London is essential to its success, then transport TO the city is equally impor-

tant. Our scheme for Heathrow East will be key to the transformation – already underway – of London's busiest airport. By 2012, 80 per cent of passengers using the airport will enjoy a 21st century experience.

And St Pancras is the latest addition to the city's international transport hubs, for rail, tube and bus.

**Links**

While the city's essential infrastructure operates both at the scale

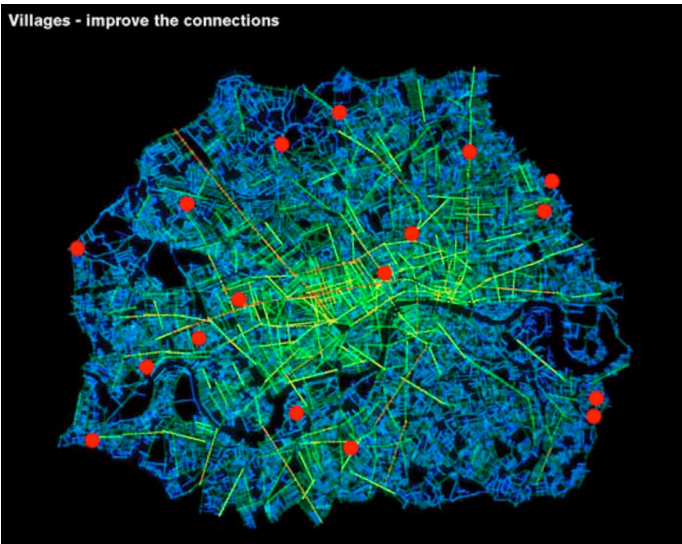


Buildings consume 44 per cent of all our energy, while transport consumes 34 per cent and industry comes third with 22 per cent. Of that percentage for transport, 26 per cent is consumed by transporting people.

It is evident, therefore, that roughly 70 per cent of our total energy consumption is influenced by the way our cities and our infrastructure are designed.

Any vision for London must attempt to reduce this overall energy consumption if the city is to have a sustainable future. The ways in which people live; work and move around are all key factors.





This is an analysis of the connectivity before the pedestrian bridge came in.

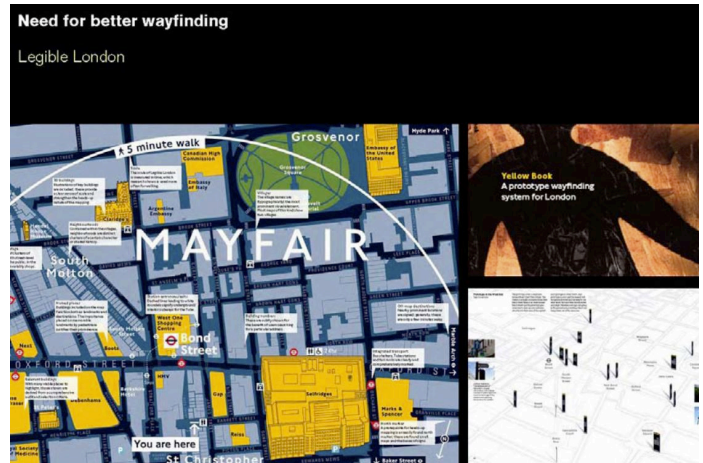


Here, you can see the additional line of the bridge and if this was a prediction then tangibly those predictions have been delivered if anything to a far greater extent than any of us ever anticipated. The bridge turned the river into a connection rather than a separation, it forged new links and established new lines of communication where none had previously existed.

of air and rail travel, equally important are the pedestrian links and cycle paths which provide connections between and within the villages. The Millennium Bridge is a physical entity, but it is also a vital tool in terms of the regeneration of the area.

It connected one of London's richest boroughs with one of its least

privileged. It has become a key element in London's pedestrian infrastructure, creating a new short cut between the City of London and Southwark. Away from the noise and pollution of traffic, it encourages people to walk, transforming the river from a barrier into a popular link. It has had a social and economic impact on both sides of the river,



Legible London - an initiative to improve London's wayfinding - is driving this forward with a pilot scheme recently introduced around the Bond Street area. There is also work underway by TfL to improve the cycle network - which, in too many cases, needs to be re-appraised.

creating new routes into Southwark - contributing to its regeneration - and encouraging new life on the embankment alongside St Paul's Cathedral. It makes some of the capital's most important landmarks, old and new, accessible to a greater public and provides the city with a remarkable new attraction. It is a place to promenade - a new public space.

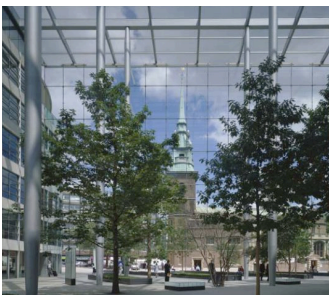
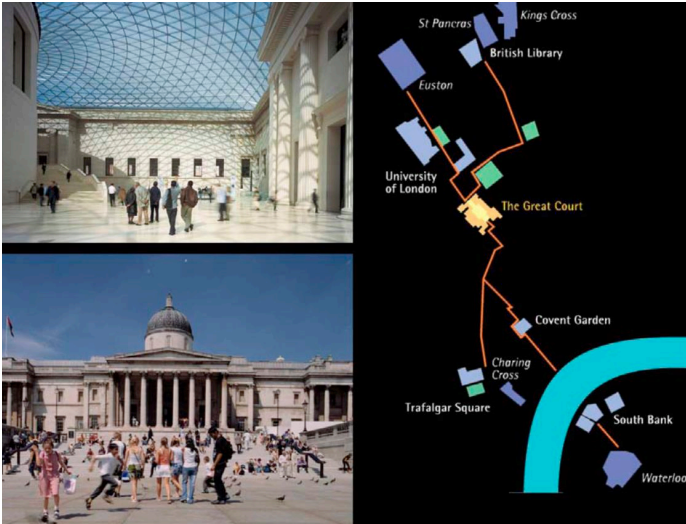
In parallel with a drive to improve pedestrian links within the city, London also faces a pressing need for an intelligent wayfinding system. Its cluster of villages has been linked over time by development and expansion, yet the pedestrian route from say, Chelsea to Mayfair remains a mystery to most.

As a cyclist, a pedestrian, a user of public transport and occasionally a driver, I have become increasingly aware that this lack of coherence of wayfinding information exists in most large cities. If we are to successfully reduce urban traffic congestion improving urban legibility is essential. In turn, this will encourage people to walk and cycle, further enhancing the city's sustainability. In this endeavour, we should also

acknowledge that information design might better strive towards a system of 'reassurance' rather than 'direction'. While people are empowered by having access to information, they can also be oppressed by it. Getting lost can be as rewarding as getting from A to B efficiently - as long as one has confidence.

The Great Court at the British Museum illustrated that there was potential to recreate a long-lost civic artery by establishing a new link in the pedestrian route from the British Library to Covent Garden and the river. We wanted to reinvent the former courtyard so that it would resonate beyond the confines of the Museum. Like the Millennium Bridge, we saw the potential for a through-way to become a civic space.

This leads on to the importance of public space. By enclosing the space beneath a glazed canopy, the regeneration of the British Museum courtyard was partly about creating a much needed heart for the Museum, but also about creating a kind of public living room - a social space for the city. The scale of the undertaking propelled it beyond a mere expansion and reconfiguration



The idea of a partially covered public plaza can also be seen with Tower Place.

of the Museum’s facilities into the realm of urban planning. Similar in scale to many of London’s smaller public squares, the two-acre covered piazza is available to all. It is a major new amenity for London and a new rendezvous for those who live or work in the neighbourhood. Entered from both the South and the North, it is now possible to walk through the centre of the Museum from Bloomsbury to Covent Garden and beyond as part of a new pedestrian route from the Euston Road to the South Bank. In this respect it is in the tradition of the Galleria in Milan or, closer to home, Burlington Arcade off Piccadilly. The idea of a partially covered public plaza can also be seen with Tower Place. The glazed atrium

at the heart of the building forms a covered extension of the piazza outside. This new space incorporates two designated City Walkways, inviting people to use it as a thoroughfare or as a sheltered place to meet friends and colleagues throughout the day.

There are also the open spaces that are integral to the quality of London’s public realm. World Squares for All Masterplan was the precursor for the Mayor’s current initiatives for public spaces.

The research we conducted for the World Squares for All Masterplan for Trafalgar Square, Parliament Square, and the surrounding Westminster area allowed us to explore the discrepancy between the picture postcard image of London, and the reality experienced at ground level.

The project also highlighted one of the key architectural challenges of contributing to London’s built environment, it is worth noting that every element within the square is listed – and the scheme involved a lengthy planning process. A long period of research, which began at the end of 1996, involved two major studies of traffic and pedestrian

movement. Consultations with more than 180 public bodies and thousands of individuals were ongoing from the inception of the project and included two major public exhibitions and questionnaires from which huge public support for change was registered.

Discussions with Westminster City Council, which had originally managed the Masterplan project, and with English Heritage, which remained throughout a key member of the World Squares Steering Group, were central to the development and implementation of the scheme. Transport for London, as client for the implementation of Phase I, and the Greater London Authority, which manages the Square on behalf of the Crown, were key members of those discussions. The planning process shaped the scheme significantly, in particular with respect to the public lavatories, café, and lifts connecting the upper and lower levels of the square.

All of our analysis confirmed the need to reduce the conflict between people and cars. We discovered that few Londoners used the centre of Trafalgar Square. Few people walked the entire ceremonial route down

Whitehall, from Trafalgar Square to Parliament Square. Visitors could not stand back in safety and admire Big Ben, Westminster Abbey and the National Gallery from the most desirable viewpoints. Londoners could not negotiate with ease the heart of their city by any mode of transport, and London could not breathe. This Central London area had all the potential to be an appropriate urban setting for the civic heart of the nation. Yet it failed on almost every count.

Despite the grandeur of its buildings and the significance of its heritage, it was a dirty and unfriendly environment, dominated by asphalt and the car. It provided no facilities for the millions of tourists who visited it each year and even fewer amenities for Londoners themselves. It was, moreover, incoherently presented: it was hard to find your way around. It contained the vocabulary of city spaces, but lacked the grammar to make sense of those spaces and facilitate communication. Our resulting scheme was a careful balancing act between the needs of traffic and pedestrians, the ceremonial and the everyday, the old and

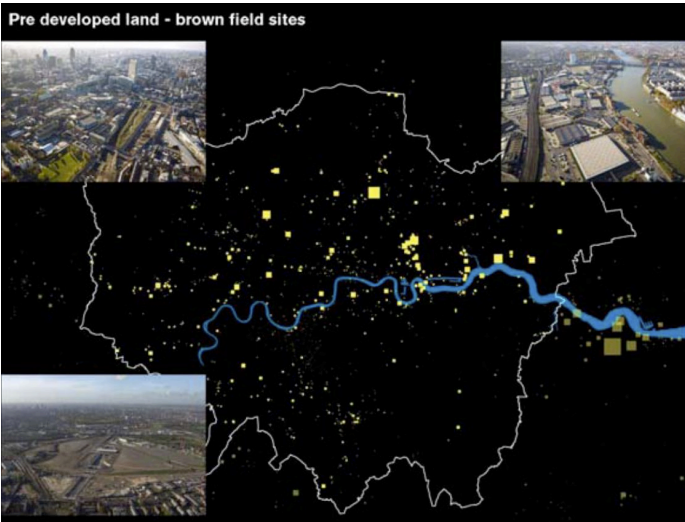






Per person:  
53 m<sup>2</sup> private garden  
85 m<sup>2</sup> public green space

It is not just the hard publicspaces, but the soft spaces – the green spaces – which are ever important. London is actually very fortunate to have generous green space – both public and private.



Brownfield Development

the new. The cumulative effect has been to transform the life of the Square.

A once unfriendly urban environment has been restored as a truly civic space – one that can be enjoyed by Londoners and visitors alike.

The transformation of Parliament Square – which suffers similar problems – is as yet unrealised, but work is underway. Part of our World

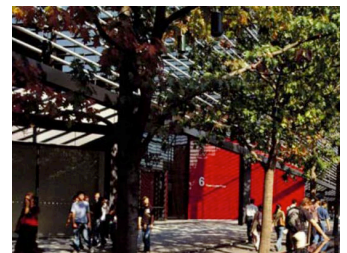
Squares for All Masterplan, we had hoped that it might look something like this. Ten years later new possibilities are being developed.. The Mayor's 100 public spaces is an important initiative.

Clearly, the improvement of London's great civic spaces need to be balanced with its more intimate everyday spaces.. It is not just the hard public spaces, but the soft

spaces – the green spaces – which are ever important. London is actually very fortunate to have generous green space – both public and private.. There is also the green-belt around the city which must be preserved.

Most important of all is social integration, creating a successful mixed community. Everything must be done to avoid the polarities so painfully evident in Paris.

Rather let us strive for a more balanced society where people of different backgrounds can live happily alongside each other – the Mayor's drive for affordable homes must be embraced or even exceeded.



Brownfield offices – More London

