

London Land Commission

The opportunities far outweigh the challenges says Amena Matin



The landscape of London is continuously changing and, with a new Government, comes the opportunity for the public sector to take a lead on shaping the next 5 years and beyond by working collaboratively on where homes should be built in London. The establishment of a London Land Commission, based at the Greater London Authority (GLA), presents an unrivalled opportunity for public landowners in London to work together to influence how and where land is released to the market.

The London Land Commission will be tasked with identifying public sector brownfield land which is surplus and could be released by 2025. One of its objectives will be to create a register of all sites in public ownership. This presents a challenge in itself. There is a lack of available data on land owned by public bodies in London. There is also an incoherent approach to the release of public land which has the potential to constrain growth in London, especially where a procurement process has not been undertaken.

There lies the opportunity in the establishment of a London Land Commission; to make this work the approach needs to be one of partnership with shared ambitions and common goals. The GLA Group, with local authorities and government departments, will need to be open to sharing their site information and asset strategies with the Commission. There has been

recent speculation about whether public bodies know what land they own and the time is right to challenge this misconception. Significantly this is, however, more than data collection. The Commission presents a compelling offer to London Councils and the Boroughs, to work actively with the GLA to build an economic case for London. By jointly identifying where homes should be built in London, land and property will be maximised through better uses, more infrastructure and increased number of homes built; enabled by the release of publically owned developable land. All of which contribute to planning for and understanding the long term sustainability needs of London's communities.

The Commission should also have the ability to go further and look at assets which have the potential to be rationalised as surplus and generate growth through a spatial approach to development. Once data has been gathered, the Commission will seek to identify opportunities for collaborative working, especially where land is in multiple-ownership, including privately owned sites, and address the barriers to those sites coming forward. This approach, surely, should empower public bodies to create the right conditions to offer sites as a single proposition to the market and accelerate the pace and delivery of land release?

To achieve the Commission's objectives, there is also a need



to ensure public bodies take a commercial approach to how land and property is released and sold. Over the past few years, pressures to achieve efficiencies and housing targets have created adverse conditions for land transactions, with too many sites having been sold in isolation or without conditions on achieving planning and development. The surplus public land programme released land in London with capacity for over 25,000 homes between 2011-2015. The GLA contributed to 25 per cent and, through procurement and development agreements, has ensured that all sites achieved planning and are under construction. The majority of these sites will deliver new homes, new jobs and create new communities by 2020. There are a number of other publicly owned sites, however, which are likely to have been sold without obligations upon the buyer or developer which is a trend the Commission will seek to address.

The biggest challenge to meeting the needs of a growing population is in London's ability to meet demand with a steady supply. A limited procurement approach risks the ability of London to adopt a forward view of public land release and development. A challenge to Government – Local and Central – is how to define best consideration and develop a procurement strategy which strengthens the inherently good policy of release of public land?

The Mayor set out his objective for an exit strategy to be in place by 2016 for all the landholdings devolved to the GLA. In total, the Mayor inherited 677 hectares of land together with joint venture interests (most notably Barking Riverside), with total capacity for over 40,000 homes and 100,000 jobs. The Mayor is using these land and property assets to drive housing supply and economic growth. Since April 2012, 94 per cent of GLA owned assets are now under contract for development or developers are in the process of being appointed, equating to over 157 hectares of land, with an estimated gross development value of £5.5 billion.

In the Royal Docks, contracts have been exchanged for Silvertown Quays and the Royal Albert Dock with a combined gross development value in excess of £4 billion, delivering over eleven million square feet of commercial space, 3,800 homes and 36,000 jobs.

Other major GLA sites already under contract include

Catford greyhound stadium, St Clement's and Queen Elizabeth hospitals in Tower Hamlets, Cane Hill in Croydon, Greenwich Square, Trenchard House in Westminster and Lymington Fields in Barking.

These sites will provide a total of over 3,000 new homes. This is huge progress and which highlights the potential to continue to build and expand on the GLA's track record to work with other public bodies through the London Land Commission.

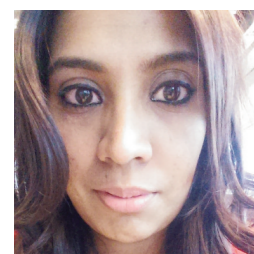
So the opportunities far outweigh the challenges; London is being presented with a solution to get its house in order. Let's not waste it. ■

ABOVE AND PREVIOUS PAGE: Greenwich Square

A former hospital site, the scheme was granted detailed planning consent in March 2009 for 645 new homes (50 per cent affordable), ancillary retail offer and a new public leisure and health centre all located in the brand new 'Greenwich Centre'. In partnership with the NHS Property Services, GLA worked with Hadley Mace, the developer, to acquire the site and re-provide new GP facilities. The area will benefit from the significant amount of new services and public realm that will be included within the development.

BELOW: The Royal Docks

The Royal Docks includes 270 hectares of the Mayor's land which includes the regeneration of the development sites of Silvertown Quays, Royal Albert Dock and Royal Albert Basin. Contracts have been entered into for Silvertown Quays and the Royal Albert Dock with a combined gross development value in excess of £4 billion, delivering over 11 million square feet of commercial space, up to 3,800 homes and 36,000 jobs



Amena Matin is senior manager, the London Land Commission