

Can we do high density at a human scale?

The Homes for Londoner's policy documents recently published by City Hall are designed to increase the number of new homes built that are genuinely affordable, with the new housing SPG highlighting Build to Rent as part of the solution, particularly for higher density development. Urban intensification is a key and recurring theme in the housing debate, unsurprisingly since London has one of the lowest densities of any major global city. Many have investigated this area, including our work – the Intimate Series - a collection of new models and toolkits which call for a fresh approach to high density development, one which is driven by people-conscious values at its core.

High density at a human scale

Much has been written on the housing crisis, but it is clear that many of those who make the city function and thrive can no longer afford to live here. As a professional working within the built environment industry, I believe it is critical not just to deliver more units, but provide a wide range of alternatives that form homes and inspiring places that are socially and economically sustainable.

It is clear we urgently need large scale change, but it is important not to neglect the details of quality of life, well-being, sense of belonging, urban vitality, character of place and community relations. Through our Intimate Series initiative, we propose "High Density at a Human scale"; an approach to housing-led development centered on how a place is experienced by those that will use it. However it is not offering design as a singular solution to multi-faceted, deeply complex problems, but is instead intended as a springboard to open up discussion and questions. It asks, can we create solutions with impact, but which are also relevant and meaningful to people, to create places that are simply enjoyable to be in?

We have developed this research following a roundtable on



ABOVE: The outline Intimate Infrastructure concept was a winner in NLA's New Ideas for Housing competition

the outline concepts with GLA officials at City Hall, which led to three strands of investigation; Intimate Infrastructure, Intimate Homes and Intimate Neighbourhoods - LDN*NYC, a new cross-city research project on place-making. The current models have >>>

RIGHT:

A vision for a more people-conscious type of development



Natasha Reid is founder of emerging architecture practice Natasha Reid Design



>>> Intimate infrastructure: seven strategies for high density at human scale

As a high-level approach, the Intimate Infrastructure principles have been developed with the flexibility to be adapted and applied to a wide range of schemes, contexts and mix of uses rather than being a “one-size-fits-all” model.

1. Embrace the sharing economy and pool resources to maximize not only land but sociability too

Contemporary models of collective living are becoming increasingly commonplace; from co-housing becoming more widespread in the UK, the continued success of co-living cooperatives in Europe to newer trends of shared hotel-style renting in New York and London. By breaking free from traditional concepts of home ownership, it is possible to capitalise on shared resources as well as desires for more convivial lifestyles.

2. Respond to pressing and future needs to develop relevant solutions

There are many groups vulnerable to the current housing situation, from local communities at risk from displacement, to private renters who cannot access home-ownership. A growing concern is providing the ageing population with a wider range of solutions to suit different lifestyles and reduce isolation. The Intimate Infrastructure model proposes creating new housing typologies that are highly responsive to specific needs, such as a purpose-built “shared house” for private renters, an update on the traditional family home and solutions for older generations who want to actively remain part of city life.

3. Truly combine typologies and tenures to make successful and sustainable communities

Cities are not homogenous. By combine different tenures and groups, schemes can provide a range of different conditions to suit people at different stages in life, incomes and lifestyle preferences. However, proximity doesn't necessarily lead to social cohesion and there are also challenges in managing common spaces. However by providing and emphasizing shared spaces for all groups, there can be greater opportunities for interaction and chance encounter.

4. Catalyse connectedness to build a sense of belonging

In tandem with the physical infrastructure for urban densification, social infrastructure must be considered to support strong communities. By providing a range of public and semi-public amenities within a development, it can be better connected to its surroundings and the wider community, giving people more opportunity to participate in communal life.

5. Create distinctive, liveable places to enhance quality of life

For high density environments, the qualities of a place become even more critical in order to avoid mass housing delivered as generic, homogenous environments. The way buildings are defined plays a key role in making distinctive places and dynamic, visually diverse settings for life. By considering smaller scale details, articulating individual dwellings, creating rhythm in a street through proportions and responding to the character of an existing location, the design of a place can contribute significantly towards a well-loved environment which is enjoyable to be in.

6. Overlap generations, uses and adaptability to build resilience

A diverse and vibrant city needs not only a dense mix of activities and people but also an architecture that has the capacity to adapt with changing needs. At the neighbourhood scale, combining places for people to live, work and play creates a critical mass of activity, sustaining businesses and vibrant,

lived-in public spaces. In the Intimate Infrastructure model, residential typologies are modular in sizes, enabling them to easily be combined to provide for people at all stages of life and be woven together with a wide variety of uses.

7. Innovate new ideas of living for changing patterns of life

The way boundaries between spaces are defined can give privacy but also enable interactions between people. By using social relations as the generator for the design of homes, new ways of living can be innovated which have an emphasis on the connections, relationships and interactions between people to address the challenges of modern living.

Intimate homes: toolkit for new prototypes

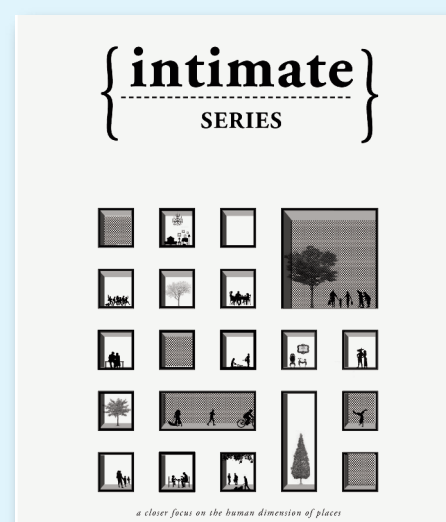
The “Intimate Homes” toolkit further develops this final principle: We have developed three prototype typologies which seek to accommodate 21st century patterns of life, initially with the Private Rental Sector and prefabricated solutions in mind.

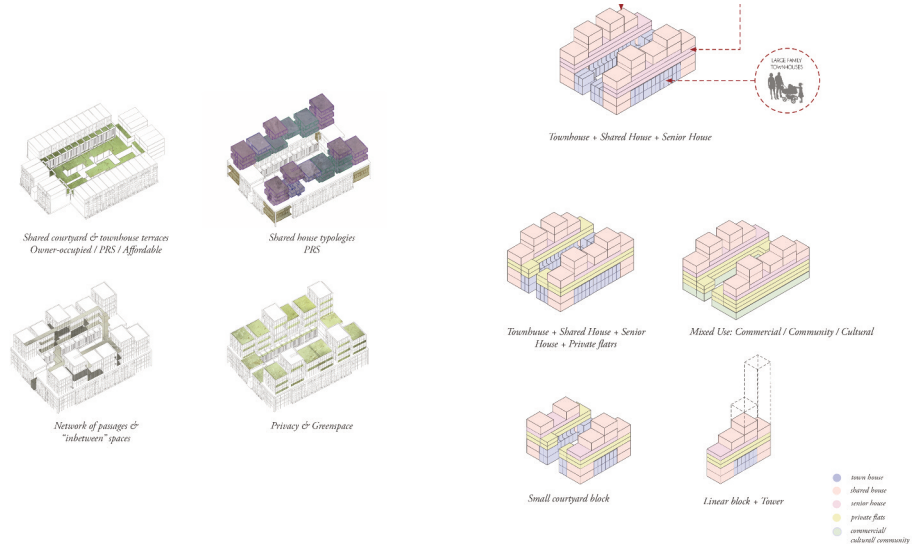
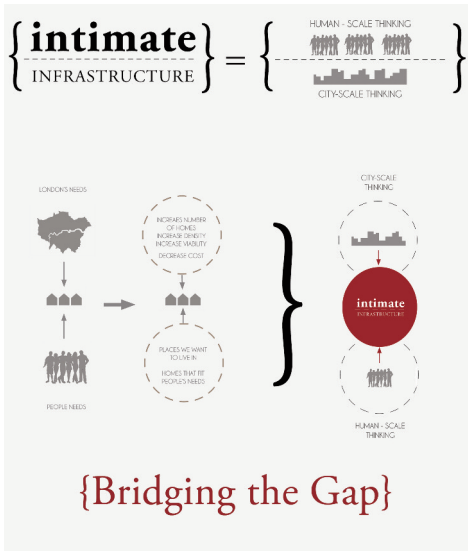
- A purpose-built shared house for small groups of people aims to foster a feeling of “being at home” and nurture a micro-community amongst renters.
- Clustered flats for older generations, developed around different levels of private and shared spaces for a more collective life and potentials for cross-generational overlap.
- An update on the traditional townhouse typology, in response to the changing nature of family structures and working patterns, with the increase in adult children returning to the family home in the face of the housing crisis.

The Intimate Series models are purposefully set out as catalysts for further discussion rather than off-the-shelf solutions. We are looking to carry on the conversation with a range of partners who are have related interests and shared aspirations.

Can we create places to fit people, and not the other way around?

If you are interested in finding out more about the Intimate Series research and toolkits, please contact natasha@natashareid.co.uk





an emphasis on the Private Rental Sector, however as part of our process we researched a range of tenure structures as precedents for building strong communities, such as co-housing and cooperatives. We envisage the Intimate Series principles could equally be harnessed and further developed specifically for these models, particularly through co-authorship processes with resident groups.

Bridging the gap

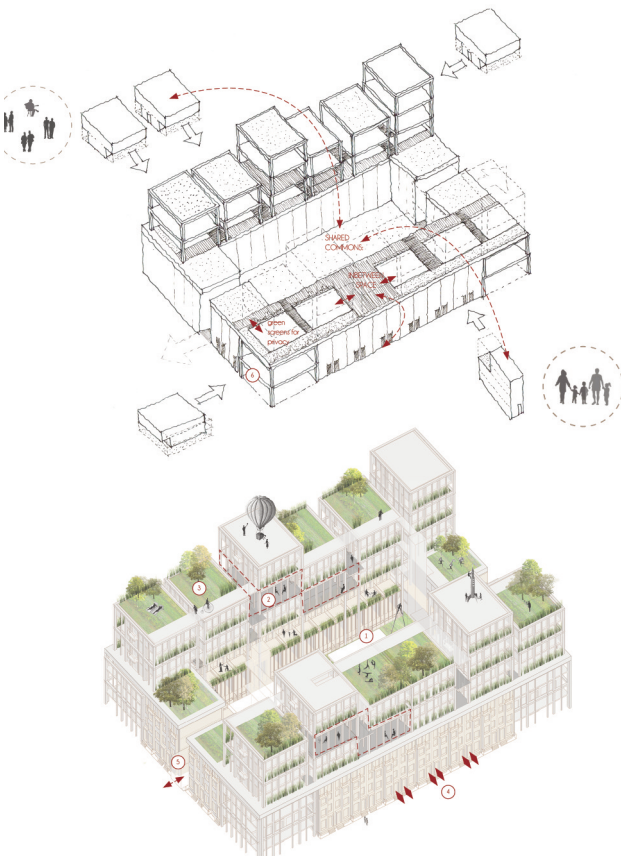
The initiative focuses on the need for an interface between the strategic level of hard numbers, viability, delivery mechanisms and the equally important human world of creating places that are liveable and distinctive. To bridge this gap, the Intimate Series proposes to put people's needs firmly at the heart of new approaches in order to deliver the types of

homes that meet changing demands and to create the types of places people want to live in. To balance with strategic concerns, could these people-conscious models for high-density development be linked to policy or simplified planning zones to combine speed of process with quality of outcome?

Principle-based design codes could benefit the development industry whilst also building the types of neighbourhoods that support the vitality and diversity so crucial to London's success. Potential benefits from such an approach could include:

- Possibilities for accelerated planning through Local Development Orders linked to a design code or particular type of development
- Incentives for developers, such as permission to build at higher densities than otherwise allowable
- High density but not high-rise unlocks difficult sites by increasing viability and lowering cost risk
- Innovations in housing types based on current needs can open up new markets
- Multi-generational, mixed tenure, mixed use communities are more sustainable and successful
- Place-making approach builds in sense of place, distinctiveness and urban vitality
- Greater public consensus could reduce opposition to development. ■

ABOVE:
Intimate infrastructure infographic
Combining tenures and typologies
Adaptability of the Intimate



LEFT:
Shared spaces for collective life

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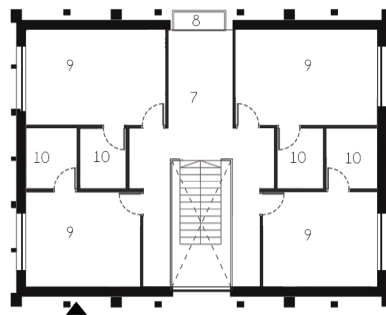
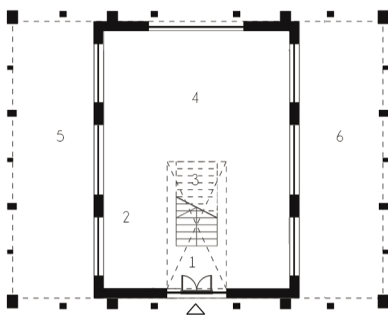
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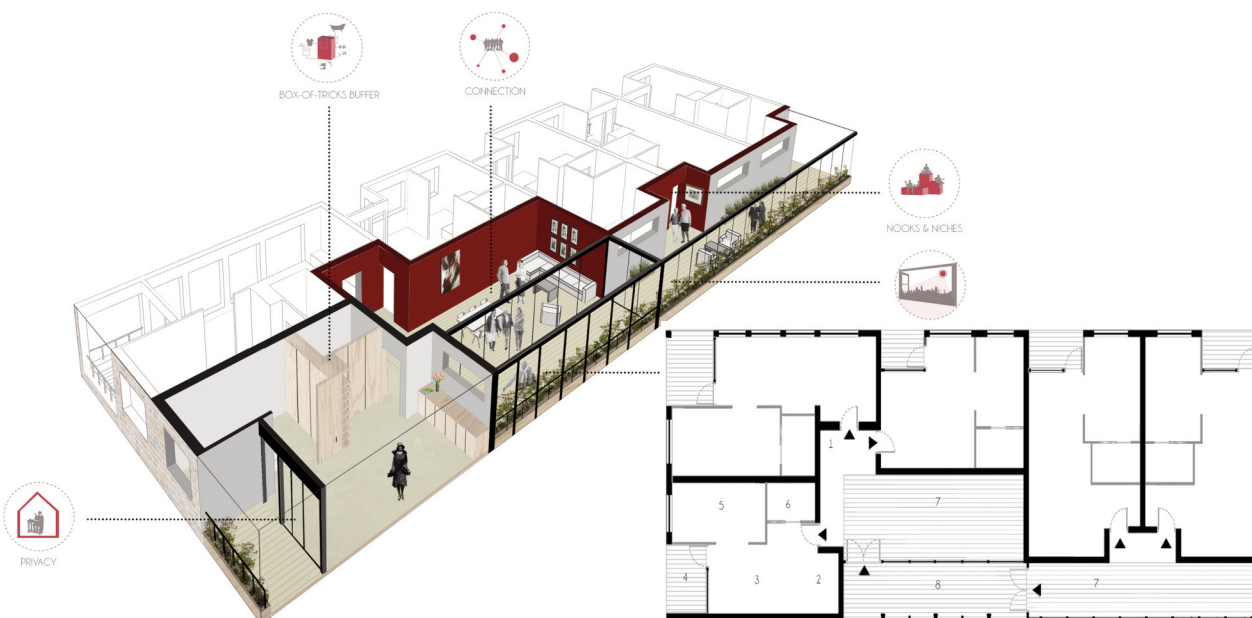
ABOVE:
Intimate Homes toolkit

LEFT:
Prototype shared house

BELOW:
Clustered flats for older generations

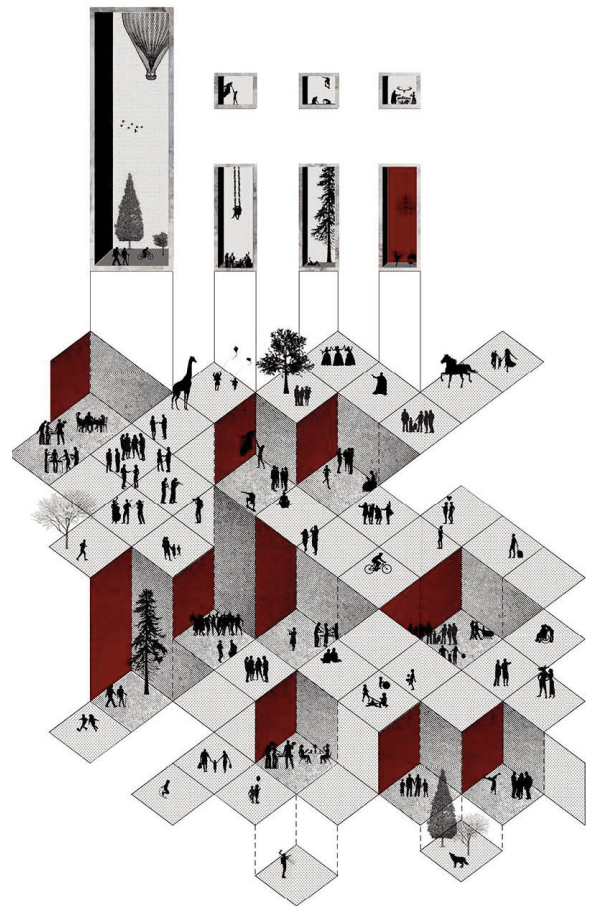
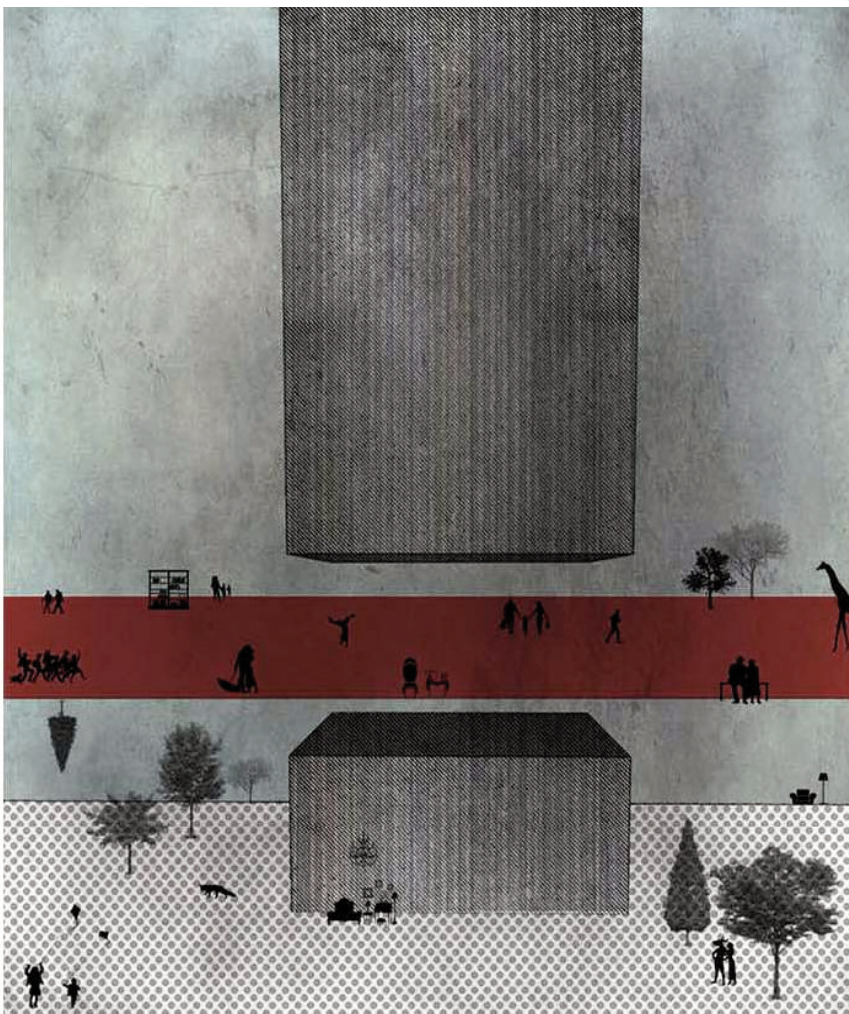


1. Hall
2. Living room
3. Double height
4. Kitchen/ dining room
5. Private terrace
6. Shared terrace/ circulation
7. Shared space
8. Balcony
9. Bedroom
10. Bathroom



1. Nooks & niches
2. Open Kitchen
3. Dining / living room
4. Balcony
5. Bedroom
6. Bathroom
7. Shared space
8. Shared terrace

RIGHT:
Re-thinking family homes
BELOW:
Plate: Re-humanising hous-
ing
BELOW RIGHT:
Plate: Seven strategies for
High Density at Human
Scale



Rehumanising Housing:

Proposing an alternative to dominant models of volume housing delivery

Seven Strategies for High Density at a Human Scale:
For a richly multifaceted, multi-layered urban environment of overlapping people, experiences, activities and moments