

GOOD GROWTH BY DESIGN

**RECOVERY**

**ROUNDTABLE**

**HOUSING DESIGN**

**MAYOR OF LONDON**

The *Good Growth by Design (GGbD) Recovery Roundtable* series invites Mayor's Design Advocates and other external experts to discuss the most pertinent topics facing London's built environment in the wake of the global health crisis and its ensuing social and economic impacts.

This sixth *Recovery Roundtable* was held on 25<sup>th</sup> August, chaired by Deputy Mayor for Planning, Regeneration and Skills, Jules Pipe and focused on housing design. Deputy Mayor for Housing, Tom Copley, and twelve participants, including Mayor's Design Advocates and other practitioners from the public, private and civic sectors contributed their ideas for how London could respond to the Covid-19 crisis and ensuring Londoners have high quality homes that are affordable, safe, and have security of tenure.

Covid, and lockdown in particular, has placed extra demands on people's homes, highlighting issues of access to open space, overcrowding, and working from home. Participants addressed ideas including new housing space standards to address these issues, flexibility and adaptability of homes, the importance of public space, and the recasting of the economic geography of the city, from a dominance of the centre toward suburban centres.

Below is a summary of key reflections and propositions for how London can react to this challenge, and the role that the Greater London Authority should play in the recovery.

## MEETING NOTE – 25th August 2020

### ALEX ELY

#### Mae, Mayor's Design Advocate

**Open space:** 'Good housing needs to be as much about the spaces in between housing. If you don't have access to open space during lockdown, that can have a huge impact on your health and wellbeing. It's important that neighbourhoods address those needs that people don't necessarily have in their own homes.'

**Health and tenure:** 'A report from the Social Market Foundation has shown that private renters have higher levels of C-reactive protein, a bio marker for stress and infection, compared with owner-occupiers. There's no end of knock-on effects in terms of people's health and sense of security from their tenure.'

**Forging new relationships:** 'There is some good news from lockdown. Things like the Thursday night 'clap for carers' has brought some neighbours closer together, being able to chat over the front fence, and forge new relationships or the support being offered to people self-isolating.'

**Interior space:** 'If you haven't got access to outdoor space, then is your interior space good enough? In terms of sunlight, daylight, privacy aspect, outlook. This shows up some of the inequalities of housing, such as acoustic problems and overcrowding, which can put huge pressure on households.'

### CLAIRE BENNIE

#### Municipal, Mayor's Design Advocate

**Redundant office space:** 'We are going to have an awful lot of redundant office space in London. Lots of companies are cutting down on office space, or even closing them altogether. Do we have a risk that this space will be converted to [unsatisfactory] homes using permitted development rights? I'm going to be quite radical and say we should just stop building [in the centre.]'

**Suburban centres;** 'Is it actually suburban centres which are going to be the new focus? People don't want to travel, they want local life, and they want local work. There's a huge opportunity here to rethink these places.'

**Design quality:** 'Is the pandemic and it's after-effects in the economic downturn going to affect quality? I don't think so, I think it will carry on as it was. What I think will be much more impactful than the pandemic on quality is [the government's proposed] planning reforms.'

**Working from home:** 'I think the big effect of the pandemic on housing is not lockdowns, but working from home. 40% of jobs can be done from home, and I'm sure that's going to completely transform London. This will cause overcrowding for people who need space to work, and isolation for the 15% of working households who live alone. We need to plan rentable workspaces on estates and in neighbourhoods to tackle these challenges.'

### DAVID OGUNMUYIWA

#### Architecture Doing Place, Mayor's Design Advocate

**Flexible planning:** 'The last few months have shown that housing policy needs to be more flexible and responsive, in particular to deal with the rise of home-working and home-schooling, provisions for inter-generational living to deal with loneliness and isolation, and access to communal public realm.'

**Homelessness:** 'Temporary homelessness preceded Covid, but was illuminated by it in a dramatic way. We have seen a lot of councils make knee-jerk responses to dealing with this issue in a way that doesn't necessarily benefit anyone. This immediate impact is a false economy if you've created a bigger problem five years down the line.'

**JONNY ANSTEAD**  
**TOWN, property developer**

**Impact on quality of life:** 'Research from the Quality of Life Foundation established that, under lockdown, people in cities have generally had a much harder time than people in rural locations. That's partly because people in rural locations tend to have more private outdoor space, which has helped support their quality of life. In cities, our quality of life depends more on the spaces we share - streets, neighbourhoods and transport - we're more intertwined with other people. We need to make these work better for us.'

**Place design:** 'We need to move away from the idea of housing design in isolation and more towards the idea of place design. We should think about people's needs in a holistic way, layered up through dwelling, street, communal space, neighbourhood, and beyond. We should think of people's quality of life as a composite of all these different things. I think developers find that very difficult.'

**Housing guidance:** 'Mostly developers would prefer things to be simple and to have some guidance on what we can deliver within the four walls of the dwelling. But life isn't like that in a city - it is more complex. And so any new guidance needs to help developers through the process of placemaking and not just housing design.'

**Resilience:** 'We didn't know Covid existed a year ago. Tomorrow's Covid might not be Covid at all, it might be something totally different. I think the much bigger question is how we build resilience into our policies and practices, so that we can respond to the 'unknown unknowns'. And that fundamentally relies on community links and sociability with our neighbours.'

**DIPA JOSHI**  
**Fletcher Priest Architects, Mayor's Design Advocate**

**Storage:** 'I've recently designed a scheme for 500 dwellings in Dublin, and learning the Irish regulations has been a real eyeopener. They have much higher requirements for storage, which have come in handy when thinking about designing in space for home-working, because you can allocate it all to one little room, which can be a flexible work space.'

**Financing:** 'The big funders are now having a lot more scrutiny of our designs as architects. The efficiency of net to gross ratios are being scrutinised at the highest level. This means we need to be really rigorous with our design and be able to prove and justify it.'

**MANISHA PATEL**  
**PRP, Mayor's Design Advocate**

**Public open space:** 'What's becoming evident is that there needs to be a lot more joined up thinking between boroughs and developers in how open space is treated. Higher densities are being built in locations not near to public open space, for example.'

**Working from home:** 'One of the key things we are designing solutions for is homeworking, and we are finding this an incredible challenge. Balconies seem to be the key place that can be used as a break out space, but we are finding it's not adequate. So we're also looking at corridor width, to incorporate it here, and really keeping offices out of bedrooms, because you need that space.'

**Thermal comfort:** 'We've seen a large increase in indoor temperatures, with the hot weather, but also because these spaces are now occupied a lot more of the time. We can look at improving insulation and air-tightness, but I think the key is more public open space.'

**NEIL SMITH**  
**HS2, Mayor's Design Advocate**

**Disability:** ‘Two in three people who have died from Covid have a disability. And 54% of Londoners who have a disabled person in the family live in poverty. This has shone a light on the impact of inequality, where overcrowding and poverty have been the perfect breeding ground for the virus.’

**Enforced isolation:** ‘I speak both as a MDA, but also as a parent shielding my son. When we were in full lockdown, we were able to go outside because nobody was there. But the moment lockdown eased, the streets became full of people again, and it’s impossible to stay 2m apart. I have colleagues who will not have confidence to leave their homes until there is a vaccine. This continued enforced isolation is a concern.’

**Access to amenity:** ‘From a housing design perspective, access to amenity, flexibility, adaptability, are all critical to provide a level of independence and mental health. It’s also about the neighbourhood, the social infrastructure that supports housing, and a good quality public realm.’

## **FAYANN SIMPSON** **L + Q housing association**

**Resilience:** ‘Covid has challenged our assumptions about the underlying resilience of our communities, with residents really stepping up to support one another. Supporting their neighbours in terms of food deliveries, medicine, and setting up community facilities. In future we need to think about what resilience actually means in uncertain times and how we can support this through the homes and places we build and services we provide.’

**Economy:** ‘As a housing association, we are really aware that many of our residents are on low incomes and don’t have a choice of where they live, or of physically not going to work. So we really need to recognise the resident’s life as a whole – work, home, family, recreation, commute, amenities – and how we might bring those closer together.’

**Design:** ‘We need to recognise that good design is an enabler, but it isn’t in and of itself a creator of communities and that sense of wellbeing. We need to always remember that residents are the creator of communities, and to have that sense of humility in our design and placemaking.’

## **ANDY VON BRADSKY** **Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government**

**Design quality:** ‘The recently-published National Design Guide is the first step for many years that the government has taken to define what quality means in the national planning system. It’s not about aesthetics, it’s about the quality of place, home, and the spaces between buildings.’

**Health and wellbeing:** ‘The guide references health and wellbeing issues. Built form needing to be compact, walkable, an emphasis on active travel, maximising access to green spaces, public places, quality landscape, space for social interaction, and an emphasis on the quality of the space in the home.’

**National model design code:** ‘Our next step is to produce the National Model Design Code, to give more bite to the requirements in the NDG. It will be a template for local authorities to create their own local codes to apply to their own local context and conditions, with a series of design parameters that make for good places across different development types.’

## **JULIA PARK** **Levitt Bernstein, Mayor’s Design Advocate**

**Government planning reforms:** ‘I would love to share your [Andy’s] optimism about the direction of travel of government, but I’m afraid at the moment I can’t. The introduction of more permitted development rights is clearly a step in the wrong direction, and while there’s

some very good things in the planning reform consultation, I think there's an awful lot to worry about.'

**Beauty:** 'The planning white paper is obsessed with beauty almost at the exclusion of everything else. It's just eye-wateringly repetitive for something that is completely subjective. Research done by CABA showed that beauty is quite far down the list of people's priorities for their home, they're much more worried about it's fitness for purpose.'

**Housing SPG:** 'My biggest concern now is whether the standards that Alex Ely has been working on [Housing Supplementary Planning Guides] will survive the new planning regime. I can't see where they fit into the hierarchy of documents that the government has outlined. I very much hope they survive, I guess they will need to be adopted by boroughs in their local design codes.'

## SELASI SETUFE

### LB Barking and Dagenham / Public Practice

**Borough response:** 'Some council initiatives that were already in place before Covid have been really helpful during the pandemic. Our Citizen's Alliance Network was helpful in coordinating a community response, and the Homes and Money Hub was helpful in giving advice to local people around money, jobs, debt, housing, etc.'

**Housing:** 'Regarding housing and regeneration, the pandemic hasn't fundamentally changed the work we are doing, however it has affirmed what we already knew about the need for high quality homes that are affordable, safe, have security of tenure.'

**Co-working:** 'Neighbourhood co-working hubs have been discussed, bringing these into the ground floors of developments across the borough, to move from the dependence on the city centre. This can be a mechanism to build a more robust and resilient local economy.'

**Beyond Covid:** 'We have been exploring doing a piece of research looking at post-pandemic London-wide, but – as Jonny Anstead mentioned earlier – we need to prepare for the next Covid, whatever that is. So instead we are looking at a more holistic approach, building resilience through placemaking and quality of housing.'

## FURTHER READING

[Good Quality Homes for all Londoners](#) draft SPG, comprising

Foreword: Good Quality Homes for All Londoners

Module A: Optimising Site Capacity – A Design-led Approach

Module B: Small Housing Developments – Assessing Quality and Preparing Design Codes

Module C: Housing Design – Quality and Standards

Module D part 1: Housing Design – Case Studies

Module D part 2: Housing Design – Case Studies (continued) and Appendices

Mayor's Design Advocates, Advocate Organisations and GLA staff are inputting into a [shared repository](#) of literature, which is a useful resource in framing built environment issues in the COVID context.

## UPCOMING ROUNDTABLES

Social infrastructure

## CONTACT

Sarah Considine, Good Growth by Design programme manager

[SarahE.Considine@london.gov.uk](mailto:SarahE.Considine@london.gov.uk)