



Opportunity for who? Five reasons the Mayor should halt the spread of Opportunity Areas (OA) - Pat Turnbull, LTF regional delegate

Described as 'London's major source of brownfield land', there are currently thirty-eight Opportunity Areas (OAs) across London, with nine 'emerging' Opportunity Areas identified as part of the draft new London Plan's quest for 'Good Growth'.

Identified as having space for at least 5,000 jobs and 2,500 new homes, some Opportunity Areas are earmarked to provide as many as 65,000 jobs and 39,000 homes. Whilst new homes and jobs are to be welcomed in theory, the shared experiences of London Tenants Federation members living in Opportunity Areas suggest concerning trends in the kind of growth which tends to result.

Here are five reasons we wish the OA would go away:

1. **Loss of local democracy.** Opportunity Areas are picked by the Mayor and have their own planning policy guidelines, called 'Opportunity Area Planning Frameworks' (OAPFs) which are largely written by the Mayor of London's office, along with the Boroughs. Do locals have any say in the boundaries of the area or whether designation occurs? Nope!
2. **Overlooking locals.** OAs are supposed to be made up of 'brownfield land'. However, these are often not empty areas, as this description suggests, but homes to long standing communities; communities which can be put at risk by, for instance, estate demolition and rising rents. Higher land values also threaten local facilities such as community halls and play areas, making it harder for youth groups, tenants and pensioners' organisations to find affordable places to meet.
3. **Bad for local business.** OAs encourage speculative office development which may replace other buildings and amenities that serve the existing local community. The jobs provided are not intended for people in the existing communities, whose workplaces are often lost. Local shops, cafes and businesses that serve the local community tend to get priced out of the area by soaring rents. All these negative effects extend to the areas around the OAs as well.
4. **Less space for families.** OAs encourage the provision of high-density housing which does not meet the needs of local communities, especially of families. With 250,000 London households living in overcrowded conditions as of 2014/15, according to research by Trust for London, family sized houses are desperately needed. But developers can make higher profits and councils can hit their housing targets more readily by delivering one- and two-bedroom homes.
5. **Not the sort of housing London needs.** According to the GLA's needs assessment, 78% of London's unmet housing need is for social rented homes. That is, homes for people who are instead stuck on housing waiting lists, in overcrowded flats, temporary accommodation or, in increasing numbers, living on the streets. Yet in OAs such as White City, or Vauxhall, Battersea and Nine Elms, targets for 'affordable' housing are as low as 15%.

London Tenants' Federation is calling on the Mayor of London to halt the spread of Opportunity Areas and to conduct a full investigation of the effects they are having on London's existing communities.