

29.10.20

# Planning for the future

## London Tenants Federation Consultation Response

**Introduction:** London Tenants Federation brings together borough- and London-wide federations and organisations of tenants (including leaseholders)<sup>1</sup> of social housing providers. Our membership also includes the London Federation of Housing Co-operatives and the National Federation of Tenant Management Organisations.

A number of our members involve both council and housing association tenants and a few involve some private tenants. LTF's main focus is engaging its member organisations and individual tenants' associations in London-wide strategic policy – particularly relating to housing, regeneration and planning.

We have strong links with other community and voluntary sector organisations in London that also have an interest in housing, regeneration, planning and community related issues.

We have engaged in most Examinations in Public of the London Plan, including that of the draft new London Plan to which we were invited to attend 19 full or half day sessions of the hearings at City Hall.

### **PILLAR 1**

**3. Our proposals will make it much easier to access plans and contribute your views to planning decisions. How would you like to find out about plans and planning proposals in the future?**

Social media, online news, newspapers / by post and e-bulletins from GLA and local planning authorities.

**4. What are your top three priorities for planning in your local area?  
Building homes for young people / building homes for the homeless / Protection of green spaces / The environment, biodiversity and action on climate change / Increasing the affordability of housing / The design of new homes and places / Supporting the high street / Supporting the local economy / More or better local infrastructure / Protection of existing heritage buildings or areas / Other – please specify]**

(i) Building social rented homes in London.

(ii) Protecting existing social rented homes.

---

<sup>1</sup> When referring to 'tenants' we mean both tenants and leaseholders (as set out in our Articles of Association)

(iii) Ensuring Lifetime Neighbourhoods are developed

**5. Do you agree that Local Plans should be simplified in line with our proposals?**

No. The proposals would remove the usual chapters and policies from Local Plans which are required to be based on evidence. The government proposes that these would be replaced by minimum requirements for development, but there is no clarity on what requirements might be set, other than a design code.

While planning policy is very technical and not particularly community friendly, we feel that a focus on addressing this this would be more effective than the removal altogether of the evidence-based policy making that the white paper is so critical of.

As a social housing tenants organisation, we have been able to challenge and offer alternative policy and grass roots evidence through our engagement in the development processes of the London Plan. Some of our members have achieved likewise at the local, borough-wide level.

Through our project work, we have supported social housing tenants and other community groups (with Just Space, another London-wide CVS Group) in influencing planning policy in the two London Mayoral Development Corporation's Local Plans.

For us, evidence-based policy has been an important way for grass-roots, lower-income, working class and excluded community groups to be able to engage seriously in the development of planning policy, locally and London-wide.

The idea of having three area types (growth, renewal and protection) may sound sensible, but in London there are very complex and overlapping types of areas and land uses. The proposal would leave fewer opportunities for community members to engage in either the development and determination of planning policy. This could create development that is even more damaging than at present.

We already have huge concerns about the way in which large-scale growth areas are determined in London in the form of 'opportunity areas' and the amount of development it is assessed they can accommodate. These have produced top down, high-end developments that have benefited mostly wealthier communities and developers. Low-income and excluded communities find it very difficult to input or to be heard in respect of their needs. Indeed, lower income communities have often been displaced from these areas. There is also no formal monitoring of these 'growth areas' over short or long-term periods of time to assess either the benefit or negative impact on lower income and excluded households in these areas.

The proposed automatic planning permission in principle is simply greater levels of deregulation providing for less, not greater, democratic access. We fear that it would lead to greater exclusion of those who already benefit least from market-led development and would lead to poorer quality development.

The suggestions of what might be protected is narrow in respect of sustainability. It covers environmental protection but there is no mention of protection on grounds of social or economic sustainability.

We propose that public land should be protected and used exclusively for public sector development. Since 1979 approximately 2million hectares of UK land has disappeared from public hands; the vast majority ending up in private hands (rather than charities or community-based groups).

We suggest it is this privatisation, rather than evidence-based policy making, which is at the root of the problem around delivery of new housing.

Brett Christophers, professor in the Department of Social and Economic Geography at Uppsala University in Sweden, wrote in the Financial Times in November 2018:

*"If it is hard to see any material gains from the history of land privatisation in Britain, examples of disbenefits are hiding in plain sight. Ex-public land fills the land banks that buttress housebuilder share prices that, in turn, determine housebuilder executive remuneration. The £75 million bonus recently 'earned' by the former chief executive of the UK builder Persimmon must be understood in this light.*

*Land privatisation is also intimately linked to the declining capacity of the public sector, especially the local public sector, to continue to provide many of the basic social and environmental infrastructures that it has done historically. Such benefits include affordable housing to allotments, libraries to leisure facilities, and playgrounds to parks, all of which depend on the ready supply of land."*

We propose there is a need for:

- facilitation of greater involvement of communities in developing policy collaboratively; in London, with the Mayor's office and London boroughs;
- funding to support communities that are so far not, or are minimally, involved in processes of developing planning policy to ensure their ideas and alternative proposals be treated equally with others who are much more familiar with the processes for developing policy;
- the language of planning policy to be more accessible;
- mandatory statements of community involvement to be drawn up by the Mayor of London for large scale opportunity areas – especially those that cross borough-boundaries;
- additional powers for the Mayor of London to require all boroughs to contribute to delivery of social rented homes in London, in addition to locally assessed need;
- a formal requirement for evidence-based longitudinal monitoring of the impact of large-scale developments on existing lower-income working-class communities.

We support the idea of identifying areas for custom-build and particularly community-led housing development.

**6. Do you agree with our proposals for streamlining the development management content of Local Plans, and setting out general development management policies nationally?**

No. We support planning policy being more accessible to enable greater involvement of local communities in the development of strategic policy and development management, not less.

Regarding the suggestion that local authorities and Neighbourhood Forums would have a greater role in local design codes: These must be evidence-based, able to be measured and monitored, not about subjective aesthetics.

**7(a). Do you agree with our proposals to replace existing legal and policy tests for Local Plans with a consolidated test of “sustainable development”, which would include consideration of environmental impact?**

No. There are three overarching objectives of sustainable development. Economic and social factors should be considered alongside environmental sustainability. We would be sympathetic to the idea of a ‘sustainable development’ test that focused on all three and which included an impact assessment relating to inequality, including that of socio-economic inequality. Clearly this would have to be evidence-based.

To achieve sustainable development there is a need for national strategic overview, particularly in terms of distribution of economic development and transport infrastructure. This must include serious reflection on the impact of Covid 19, which has highlighted existing and worsening inequalities not just across the country but also within cities like London. This would need input from the local level to form the basis for locally based strategic and development management policies.

In respect of the economy, for example, the LSE has previously promoted the German model of a multi-hub country, with around 10 high productivity areas – as an alternative to the huge focus on London and the South-East, which is not sustainable and continues to contribute to inequalities.

To achieve such a plan the Government would also need to provide information on the financial support that it would provide – including for desperately needed social rented homes. At present government subsidy to support development of the private / market sector is three times that provided for ‘affordable housing’ – much of which is not actually affordable to around half of those in need of housing in London.

The increased digitalisation suggested may support some additional engagement, but would also exclude many. Not all individuals have smart phones and a large number of low-income households don’t have access to computers. Others who will more likely be excluded are older people and those that don’t have English as a first language.

While there is no problem with digitalisation as an additional way of engaging, it must be accompanied by face to face meetings (post-Covid 19) and documents published in more

accessible language. Opportunities for mutually supportive groups to gather and to engage in full discussion and hear others' points of views should be retained and expanded on.

**8(a). Do you agree that a standard method for establishing housing requirements (that takes into account constraints) should be introduced?**

**[Yes / No / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]**

No, not as proposed. It seems that the government's aim is to deliver 337,000 new homes annually, nationwide, through the private market, without regard to capacity to deliver nor consideration of evidence of the need for non-market sector homes.

In London there are unacceptably high levels of unmet need for social-rented homes for those that can't afford market homes. This includes the 60,720 homeless families that are living in temporary housing, the almost 119,000 overcrowded social rented households, and others living in homes that don't adequately meet their needs.

Some of the individual area housing targets set out as part of the government's most recent non-evidence-based plans (changes to existing planning policy) are not deliverable. London does not have sufficient land to absorb an annual 93,000 homes – without horrendous levels of overdevelopment and over densification. We fear this target would lead to greater loss / demolition of existing (social rented) housing simply to provide land for more housing that is actually less affordable. This is not sustainable development.

The London target is almost a third of the 337,000 for the whole country. It is complete fantasy to consider that this number might ever be delivered when on average, over the last 10 years, delivery in London has been just 32,000 per annum.

There should be a standard way for local authorities and the Mayor of London's office to assess housing need. However, this must (unlike these suggestions) be grounded in evidence of both the need for different types of tenure and sizes of housing and the land available to deliver, together with government financial support to deliver the social rented homes most desperately needed.

**8(b). Do you agree that affordability and the extent of existing urban areas are appropriate indicators of the quantity of development to be accommodated?**

**[Yes / No / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]**

No. Quantity of development, as we have stated in response to q8(a) of both homes and employment must be determined by (i) evidence of capacity to deliver and (ii) assessed need. The government must commit to providing the funding required to support the delivery of social-rented homes, for which there is greatest need.

The government's approach of calling for delivery of large numbers of homes is based principally on a demand and supply theory that is faulty in respect of the housing market. Housing investment markets operate differently to user markets.

Building more homes (regardless of type) will not deal with the housing crisis and would not prevent house prices from continuing to rise.

The Kate Barker national review of housing supply of 2004 recognised this, saying that even if private housebuilding roughly doubled from 120,000 to 240,000, house prices would still continue to rise on a trend of 1.1 per cent above inflation. The review said that to stop house prices rising at all would imply a level of market housebuilding that would be “undesirable and unachievable”<sup>2</sup>.

**9(a). Do you agree that there should be automatic outline permission for areas for substantial development (*Growth* areas) with faster routes for detailed consent? [Yes / No / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]**

No. We are very worried that this will result in poor quality development and growth that does not meet the evidenced need of low-income working-class households / excluded communities.

**9(b). Do you agree with our proposals above for the consent arrangements for *Renewal* and *Protected* areas? [Yes / No / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]**

No. We fear it would likely result in carte blanche demolition of exiting social rented homes and loss of existing employment land.

We note that according to research carried out by Professor Loretta Lees, since 1997, 161 large London council estates (55,000 homes) have been demolished, with about 131,000 people displaced<sup>3</sup>. Demolition and displacement from small estates were not included in the research. Replacement homes have often been more expensive than the existing homes resulting in an overall loss of social rented homes. This impacts negatively on both existing and new communities. Demolition of social rented housing is not sustainable development. It is environmentally, socially and economically damaging.

We do not feel it appropriate to have permitted development in protected areas. We propose that the definition of protected areas should include public land, including for example areas of social rented homes, sites for gypsies and travellers and areas of employment land (given the very large rate of loss in London)

**10. Do you agree with our proposals to make decision-making faster and more certain? [Yes / No / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]**

Not sure. Generally, the proposals to use digital technology and standardisation of information may be useful but as already highlighted, we have concerns about digital exclusion and how the government proposes to address this. Also, planning assessments should continue to be more than a tick boxing exercise that might be carried out by mechanical means, particularly in respect of large-scale developments.

There is an absence of information in the consultation about the role of the Mayor of London and potentially other Mayors in England in determining applications of potential strategic

---

<sup>2</sup> [http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20120704150620/http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/barker\\_review\\_report\\_494.pdf](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20120704150620/http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/barker_review_report_494.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.urbantransformations.ox.ac.uk/blog/2018/challenging-the-gentrification-of-council-estates-in-london/>

importance. We have grave concerns about the London Plan's focus on the form of growth that we feel has mostly benefitted the higher end of society at the expense of those with lower incomes. That said, we support there being a London-wide strategic plan and a role for the Mayor of London in determining applications of potential strategic importance. However, in this respect, the development and monitoring of Mayoral statements of community involvement, as suggested in response to Q5, would better serve communities living in London's opportunity areas.

While some national evidence-based standards may be useful, we feel there is also a role for development of regionally based standards that take into account the very specific contexts of large and densely populated cities, as occurred initially in London around space standards and lifetime homes. These can lead to innovation which should not be curtailed.

**11. Do you agree with our proposals for accessible, web-based Local Plans?  
[Yes / No / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]**

Not sure. These could be helpful in terms of widening engagement from some sections of the community, but as already highlighted we have concerns around digital exclusion and how this might be addressed. More accessible non-digital formats are also essential.

**13(a). Do you agree that Neighbourhood Plans should be retained in the reformed planning system?  
[Yes / No / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]**

We have supported local and more excluded communities in developing both community and neighbourhood plans (with Just Space). However, it's not clear how they would relate to the proposed limited local plans and top down national standards.

It is the case that most Neighbourhood Plans are developed in areas where the communities are more familiar with planning, urban design and architecture. We would therefore highlight the need to ensure lower income and excluded communities can fully engage in the process of developing neighbourhood plans including through provision of funding to support capacity building and widen accessible engagement.

## **PILLAR 2**

**15. What do you think about the design of new development that has happened recently in your area?  
[Not sure or indifferent / Beautiful and/or well-designed / Ugly and/or poorly-designed / There hasn't been any / Other – please specify]**

We are most concerned about building use, in terms of what has been developed in London. There has been a lot of exclusive luxury development across London, taking up land that should be available for building social rented homes for which there is greatest need. As highlighted previously we are concerned about loss of existing industrial areas and social rented homes and replacement with expensive homes, financial or business districts – creating displacement of lower-income working class households.

Broadly we feel there should be a better quality of construction which is of good environmental and social quality. Measures of embodied carbon emissions over periods of construction of buildings and their lifetime should be required. We feel that there should be a requirement that homes are designed to last for at least 150 years and their lifespans should be extended further through refurbishment. We feel that homes should be designed so that they can be easily adaptable; supporting householders to remain in them for the duration of their lives.

**16. Sustainability is at the heart of our proposals. What is your priority for sustainability in your area?**

**[Less reliance on cars / More green and open spaces / Energy efficiency of new buildings / More trees / Other – please specify]**

See response to Q15 and Q7a. We question the extent to which sustainability is at the heart of these proposals. We repeat that social and economic sustainability should be as much a priority as environmental sustainability. We observe that there is a lack of expression of concern about gentrification; displacement of lower-income working class communities and general failures to address the desperate need for social-rented housing in London (relating to failures to achieve social sustainability) in the white paper.

**20. Do you agree with our proposals for implementing a fast-track for beauty? [Yes / No / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]**

No. This is nothing but madness. Beauty, as determined by anyone, does not equal good quality design with criteria that can be properly evidenced and measured.

### **PILLAR 3**

**21. When new development happens in your area, what is your priority for what comes with it?**

**[More affordable housing / More or better infrastructure (such as transport, schools, health provision) / Design of new buildings / More shops and/or employment space / Green space / Don't know / Other – please specify]**

Delivery of social rented homes along with good quality green, play, social and community infrastructure. We feel that the generic term 'affordable housing' should be scrapped. The only type of so called 'affordable' housing that is actually affordable to around half of those who need a home (in London) is social rented.

**22(a). Should the Government replace the Community Infrastructure Levy and Section 106 planning obligations with a new consolidated Infrastructure Levy, which is charged as a fixed proportion of development value above a set threshold?**

**[Yes / No / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]**

No. We would support CIL (as well as section 106) being used to deliver social rented homes. We also feel that section 106 should be used predominantly for delivering social rented homes (given the extreme need for this type of housing).

We note that in years 2005-12, 5,890 'affordable' homes were delivered in London via nil grant section 106, 40% of which were social rented and 60% low cost home ownership. In 2012-19 more 'affordable' homes were delivered via nil grant section 106 (9,974) but only 15% were social rented homes.

**24(a). Do you agree that we should aim to secure at least the same amount of affordable housing under the Infrastructure Levy, and as much on-site affordable provision, as at present?**

**[Yes / No / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]**

See our response to Q22(a)

Yours sincerely

Pat Turnbull and Pauline Hutchison

Regional representatives  
London Tenants Federation