

Reports from Sub-Regional Meetings

February 2022

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“I found the East London sub-regional meeting was a very good forum for discussing common issues concerning council and social housing. It is vitally important that we come together from different sectors of public and social housing, including my sector, the cooperative housing movement, to swap experiences and to identify common problems.

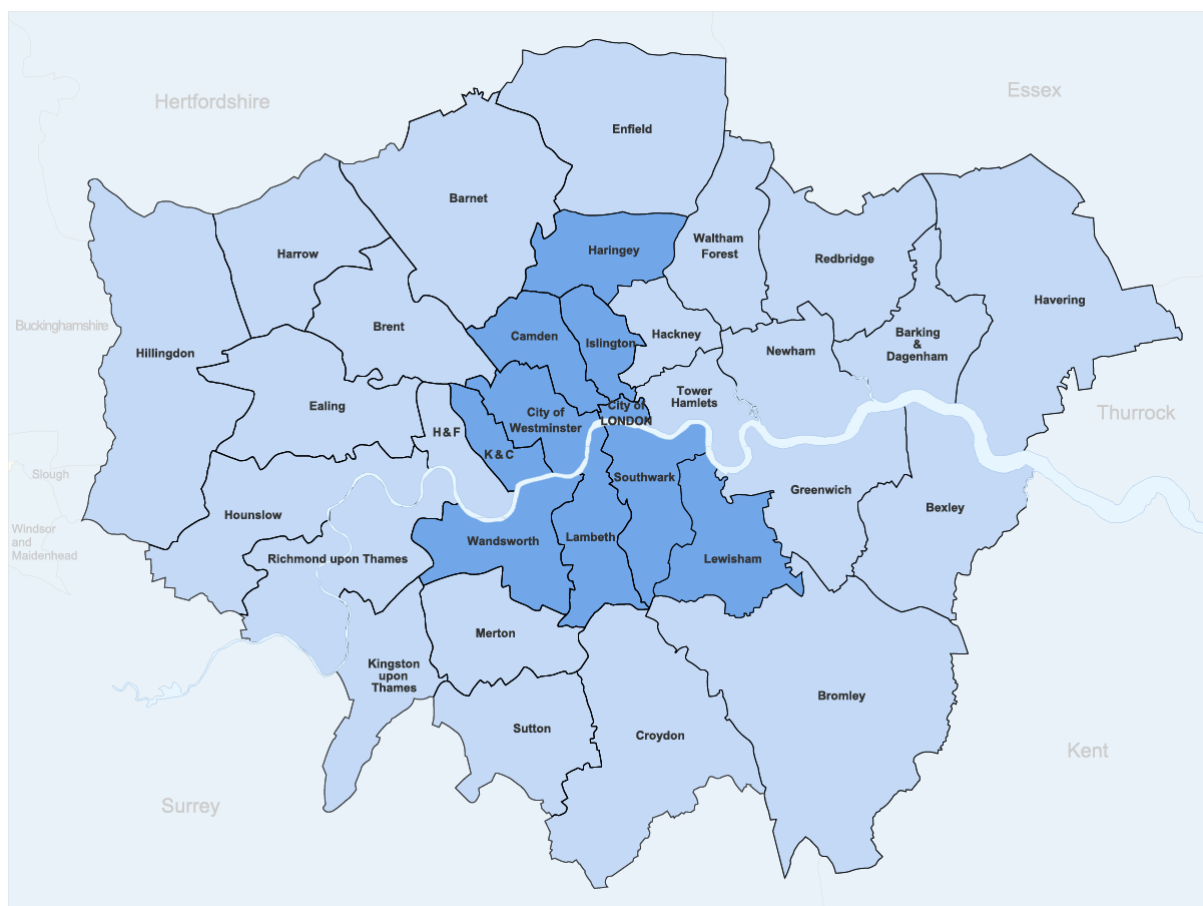
There is a wealth of experience from housing activists and tenants and residents which we need to draw upon, as we campaign for decent and truly affordable housing for all.”

*Chair of Longlife Housing Cooperative (Newham)
Executive member of LFHC
Chair of SHAC*

CENTRAL CORRIDOR SUB-REGIONAL MEETING SUMMARY

03 February 2022

The Central Corridor sub-region brings together tenants from **Camden, City of London, City of Westminster, Haringey, Islington, Kensington & Chelsea, Lambeth, Lewisham, Southwark, Wandsworth** - identified in the map below.



Introduction: These boroughs are grouped together not only because they are geographically located in the central part of London, but because they are involved in an existing [Central London Forward](#) strategic partnership.

In this first meeting, we explored the opportunity areas and growth corridors in this sub-region which includes 20 of London's 47 opportunity areas (OAs), and falls into six of London's eight growth corridors. **OAs** are identified in the [Mayor's London Plan](#) as key locations with potential for new homes, jobs and infrastructure of all types. Many are linked to existing or potential public transport improvements and typically have capacity for at least 2,500 new homes or 5,000 new jobs, or a combination of the two.

The Central Corridor is also home to the [Central Activities Zone](#), a designated central London area whose boundaries encompasses key institutions including the government and judiciary, universities, banks and museums and cultural centres. The area within the CAZ is subject to a Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) - an explanatory document which guides how planning policies are implemented in a given area.

Meeting discussion on large scale development: In the Central Corridor sub-regional meeting, tenants spoke about how highly concentrated, ongoing development within OAs affects housing throughout the sub-region. They also spoke about the important connections to be made between themselves and their boroughs given their proximity to the CAZ and corresponding points of intensive economic activity and global investment.

Tenants identified that the opportunity areas throughout the Central Corridor have been characterised by a lack of enforcement of social housing policy, even when social rent homes are promised to residents, as in the case of the demolition of the Heygate Estate in Southwark, [where 1,212 council homes were demolished to be replaced with only 100 social rent homes in the new Elephant Park development](#).

Or, as a council tenant from Wandsworth pointed out, they relinquish opportunities to build social housing and give free reign to developers.

- There is resident disappointment with these heralded OAs. The Battersea/Nine Elms/Vauxhall development was supposedly going to benefit jobs and provide truly affordable housing for local people. Initial information proposed 40% social housing. Then there was the financial crash, and it all went in favour of the developers. A lot of the section106 (planning gain) money went towards subsidising new tube stations, still using old land values. It all worked out in favour of the developers. It was a huge opportunity, one in a lifetime, for Wandsworth. Social housing dropped from 40% to 9%.

Tenants also discussed how infill is proposed as an alternative to demolition, but that tenants don't want to lose green or play spaces.

- 'Lots of the council estates that were built in and around the Kings Cross area are suffering through overdevelopment and fighting against not losing green spaces.'
- 'It is concerning that there is discussion about social housing on green spaces and infill, but this is being seen as the only option because

Southwark okayed the demolition of the Heygate and Aylesbury Estates. And they haven't delivered the social housing that was promised.'

Multiple tenants questioned the terminology 'opportunity'.

- 'Residents are sceptical about OAs. 'Opportunity for whom? Is it an opportunity for residents who are already there, or wealthier residents coming in?'

Similarly, tenants questioned the prioritisation of office buildings, commenting on how there are many empty buildings that are just serving as speculative investment properties for rich people from overseas.

In some boroughs, there is a big push for the construction of hotels. This prioritisation of tourism over housing has made parts of central London into 'dormitory zones' and reinforces for tenants that money is being invested to attract international business people and investors, and tourists, but little is being spent on the people who call London home.

- In North Lambeth, there's a big push for building hotels. I live in Lambeth towers. A church made a deal with a hotel chain, and is building a big complex which is partially a rebuilt church and hotel tower which is slightly bigger than our tower. It blocks our views and light. Across the road, there is a big hotel. It seems like everywhere there's loads of hotels. It's a dormitory zone. I get apprehensive thinking there might be some ulterior plans regarding our estate: getting rid of it and building a hotel here as well.

What might inclusive regeneration might look like? Meeting attendees were very clear: development should serve communities, themselves. Housing should be built and constructed to encourage community engagement.

- 'It shouldn't just be about building homes, but encouraging communities to connect with their areas.'
- 'It's not just the building new homes, but how we connect with our areas — refurbishing and revitalising estates and the surrounding areas.'

There was a major emphasis in the meeting on co-design and genuine consultation.

- 'Social housing tenants must be involved in planning from the start, and their input has to be taken seriously. Consultations should not be 'tick box-y'. People should come out of the process and feel their input was actually considered. It should not be a fight.'

- ‘Developers spent millions of pounds to engage people and try to do something properly bottom-up, but their efforts were pathetic. When people did get involved, [the developers] ignored what they said. It was predetermined in favour of mass demolition, like the big developments they’ve done in other areas.

‘On a small budget, we’ve engaged people even with limits of COVID. But it’s so frustrating that the Mayor of London just waived the council’s plans and then waived through. So, what’s the point of the London Plan, in terms of protecting tenants’ interests? I don’t think the Mayor has really stood up to any developments in any substantial way.’

Goals and objectives for the Central Corridor Network:

- Information sharing, especially about cross-borough issues and concerns was very important.
- Sharing tools - for example through the development of information packets, which could make it easy for residents to understand what they are capable of achieving and how they can do so.
- Its importance to have a place to plan campaigns and actions, and link up existing campaigns fighting similar issues.
- Using the network as a way of sharing stories and experiences, including through videos, podcasts and online archives/exhibitions.
- Build new relationships and strengthen existing networks.

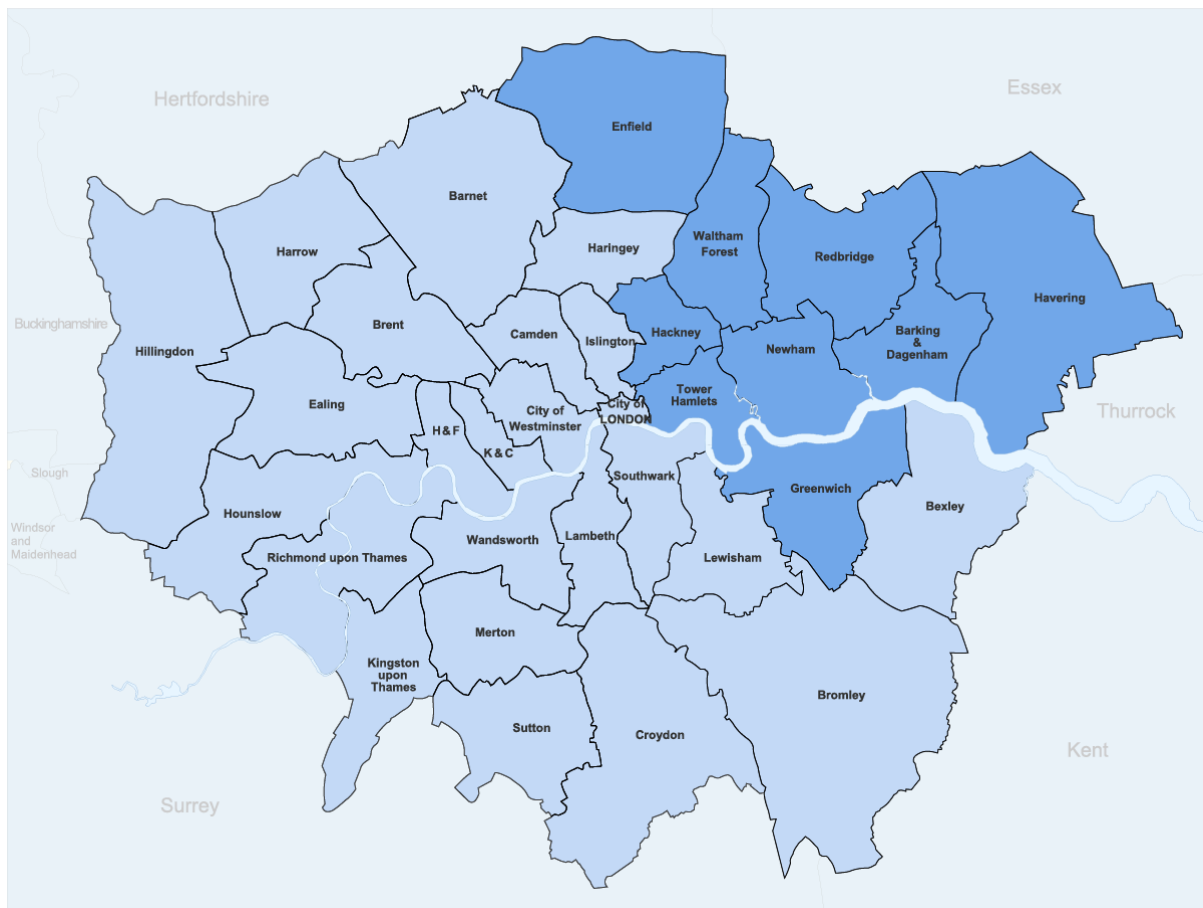
Next steps

- WhatsApp to facilitate communication.
- Development of an alternative to the CAZ — potentially called the Community Activities Zone — which identifies the assets that matter to central London’s residents, not its investors or visitors.
- Develop relationships through walking tours in other boroughs and on other estates led by fellow sub-regional network members.

EAST LONDON SUB-REGIONAL MEETING SUMMARY

04 February, 2022

The East London sub-region brings together tenants from **Barking and Dagenham, Enfield, Greenwich, Hackney, Havering, Newham, Redbridge, Tower Hamlets and Waltham Forest** - identified on the map below.



Introduction: These boroughs were grouped together not only because they are geographically located in the eastern part of London, but also because there are existing partnerships between the local authorities. Most are partnered in the [Local London](#) strategic sub-regional partnership.

Six of the boroughs — Barking and Dagenham, Greenwich, Hackney, Newham, Tower Hamlets and Waltham Forest are the '[Growth Boroughs](#)' that have a **principle of convergence**, that is "***Within 20 years the communities who host the 2012 Games will have the same social and economic chances as their neighbours across London.***" This was also defined as a '*lasting legacy of renewal for what has traditionally been London's and the UK's poorest area.*

In this first meeting, we explored the opportunity areas (OAs) and growth corridors in the East London sub-region. The East London sub-region includes 14 of 47 opportunity areas, and falls into seven of London's eight growth corridors.

One of the notable opportunity areas in the sub-region is the Olympic Legacy opportunity area, which occupies 1984 hectares in Hackney, Newham, Tower Hamlets and Waltham Forest. The largest part of it is in Newham. The area has its own planning authority, separate from the boroughs where it is situated - the [London Legacy Development Corporation \(LLDC\)](#).

This year marks one decade since the London 2012 Olympic Games. In this meeting, we spoke about what the 'legacy' actually looks like for tenants. Below are quotes from the meeting, edited for clarity.

Gentrification:

This was a major topic of discussion:

- 'How many people have been forced out of the area? We have had high density, high prices, not delivering on social housing need: this is propaganda that needs to be addressed.'
- 'It's hard to gentrify right around because much of the stock is terraced houses. It's where it's gone outwards. It's hard to tell what's been gentrified, because it's less the building stock and more the people who live in the buildings. They are people you'd expect to live in bigger properties elsewhere.'
- Future Shoreditch, Dalston, Hackney Central: all these areas are covered by the City Fringe Opportunity Areas or part of the Lee Valley opportunity areas. The level of consultation on opportunity areas hides them. They put out consultation on the planning criteria, but few knew about it. The councils don't talk about it so people didn't realise it was happening, and that it would impact development around us. People know there are things happening around them, but they don't realise that there is a master plan for this.'
- In our discussions of the Olympic Games, we also looked at gentrification maps and measurements published in a recent report by [Runnymede Trust](#). This data, which focuses on population change between 2010 and 2016 including indices of deprivation provided people the opportunity to see where gentrification had occurred in their boroughs, as well as evidence to support their anecdotal experiences.

Gentrification and the relationship with poor quality local authority housing management in (Waltham Forest) and potential infill development

Tenants spoke in detail about bullying on their estate by their landlord.

- 'Our 'refurbishment' has been going on for some time. Gentrification is obvious and they might encroach on our green spaces because they are looking to develop wherever they can. They're not showing any regard for current council tenants and low-income families, and seem to want to get everyone out. If they can't evict you, it's to price you out. There's no clear or proper planning and no consultations. And after they do the works, they'll hike up rents. And because we are in an older style council block, some rooms are bigger than in the new buildings being built, so the need for us to get out is even higher.
- 'In 2002, we had our first meeting about refurbishment/regeneration. In 2013, they came back saying 'how would you like the flats to look, or the tower blocks to look'. They already had three sets of plans up, and had a survey. The council kept pressuring tenants' representatives to sign non-disclosure agreements on the discussions we were having with them but we refused. In the end, Waltham Forest council basically stopped the core group of us, and it was a constant fight. Meanwhile, they were decanting those who were overcrowded and at the same time keeping those properties empty, profiling who they wanted to put in the block.
- 'We thought we would get new bathrooms and kitchens, but the council changed its mind to instead put in district heating, sprinklers in every room and heat detectors, but they wanted to take out the second fire escape route. There was no consultation with residents. There was bullying and intimidation by contractors at our doors, threatening residents. At the moment, we are sitting ducks. There are refurbishments taking place with us in our homes, and they're not even moving people with disabilities out. There is drilling done on top of our heads. They just don't care. To them these are housing units. To us it's our homes.'
- They've gone so far as to single out tenants' representatives and say we incite the residents to protest. They said we were preventing major works and that our tenancy is subject to review. We've had to tape every interaction to keep them accountable.
- Bullying is at an all-time-high rate. They stopped all resident meetings and insist on dealing with residents on a one-to-one basis.

There's clear opportunity for greater organisation and tactic-sharing around this, and there was clear interest among other meeting participants to provide a broad base of support for these tenants, even if they lived in different boroughs.

The Legacy:

We also spent some time speaking about the actual legacy of the Olympic Games, with recognition that a more in-depth conversation is needed:

- 'In Newham, the Olympic Legacy was supposed to increase access to sport and improve health outcomes. Newham is still one of the worst in the country in terms of health and well-being. There's lots of multigenerational housing and overcrowding. The number of gypsy and traveller pitches haven't really improved - the legacy has failed there too. I know people who live in those blocks of flats from the Olympic Village; rents have come down because there are loads of structural problems as the buildings were put up cheaply and quickly.'

'The LLDC hasn't met the social housing targets and neither has Newham in the rest of the borough and they have no intention of doing so. Newham says they'll build a bunch of homes, but it seems they are scattered, not really estates. Units run by local councils are projected to take years, and don't fundamentally deal with the problems that Newham has at the moment. Facilities to expand co-ops are very limited as well.'

Green space and infill development:

We broached discussion around lack of green space and infill in the context of gentrification and development:

- There are other bits of space, like that big space at Greenwich Peninsula, where they could have built social housing. But it's been built up with private/market housing.

'We don't want to lose the green space we have, because there are other ways of sorting out the housing shortage. New small and medium sized developments are all for buying, not for social rents. Whatever housing solution - it is basically for people to buy, nothing like the old-style social housing we grew up with, and which some of us are still lucky to live in.'

What do we want to get out of the network and future meetings?

- Information and communication; to know that we're not alone, and that the same thing is happening to social housing throughout. Information so that we know what we are talking about.

- Formal networks have been eroded, but the only way to have power and influence is to provide some sort of links and networks.
- At the end of the day, no one will help us but ourselves – we are fractured.
- Step by step guides, linking up campaigns — there’s no point replicating what others are doing.
- In the past, there was a Federation of TRAs in Newham, where tenant representatives came together and networked and discussed regularly. My understanding is the council disbanded it because it had too much power. That speaks volumes to it being needed. It’s all the same: gentrification, lack of communication, bullying, etc. The difference is that before it was funded by the council, but they had the power to disband it. There’s nothing that would have more ‘oomph’.
- We need new ways of increasing members of the networks.
- Having meetings during the working day excludes a lot of people, especially as COVID is ending. An evening meeting might be better next time.

A consensus view from the meeting was that development must be inclusive. We must have genuine regeneration and community investment, but not that which pushes out poorer people.

SOUTH LONDON SUB-REGIONAL MEETING SUMMARY

09 February 2022

The South London sub-region brings together tenants from **Bexley, Bromley, Croydon, Kingston upon Thames, Merton, Richmond upon Thames, Sutton**. This region is identified in the map below.



Introduction: These boroughs were grouped together not only because they are geographically located in the Southern part of London, but also because there are existing partnerships between their local authorities and because they have similarities in housing stock.

Five of the seven boroughs' local authorities make up the South London Partnership (Croydon, Kingston, Merton, Richmond, Sutton).

Four of the seven boroughs have no council-owned social housing following stock transfers to housing associations (Bexley, Bromley, Merton, Richmond).

Borough federations/organisations of Tenants and Residents Associations within these boroughs have largely been dismantled and defunded.

In this first meeting, we explored the opportunity areas and growth corridors in the South London sub-region. The South London sub-region includes seven opportunity areas, and falls into five of London's eight growth corridors. We also spoke about the lack of tenant engagement and organisation in this sub-region, and discussed the challenges that tenants are facing in coming together with a loud and unified voice. Furthermore, tenants have found local authorities have grown increasingly unresponsive, ineffective and incompetent, contributing to feelings of disillusionment and giving up.

Estate demolition, regeneration and developments

In this meeting, tenants shared their experiences with opportunity areas in relation to estate demolition and regeneration – from one borough:

- 'It's a foregone conclusion. They've been making decisions based on opportunity areas regardless of their designation.

'I'm not necessarily against demolition, but they used the excuse that the estate is in an opportunity area for its demolition. You have some people that use the argument that we're not in an opportunity area because it's not in the London Plan, but in essence, it's been agreed even if the boundaries have not.'

Tenants from South London also expressed views that local authorities have grown increasingly unresponsive, ineffective and incompetent – including this:

- The School Lane Estate had an issue with a building across from it on the other side of a very small road. They were going to build a new building for the school across the flats. They had somebody produce a map, and we went to measure things on the ground and took photographs and made up a scale photograph collage of the graphic that the architects had used and stuck it on the real picture. The thing that worried me was that the planning officer didn't understand what I had done. He was quite unsure of how I got the scale. That really worried me, that the planning officer — who was the person who had the main input and who has relied on by the council to provide them with the input they need to make decisions — was not capable.

If we're in a situation where costs are being monitored very carefully, are they paying the council officers who do this work enough in order to get good officers? They don't have a borough architect office anymore, so where are they getting their planning officers from? Are they people that understand what they are doing?'

Concerns expressed relating to development:

- 'All over London, there are big issues where developers have come in and they promise the world and then develop something completely different and they push working class and poor people out of the borough and produce something no one wants to / can afford to buy anyway.
- 'Living in Croydon for the last 30 years, I've seen so much going on. Looking at the Mayor's Plan, it doesn't seem that the plan is for suburban boroughs. There is much more happening in the centre. The city itself and the borough, is going down. There is a lack of investment. Last year, it was declared bankrupt. Developers have taken advantage of the situation, chipped in, and they're driving local people out of their houses. Residents have nothing to encourage them to stay in the borough.'

Weakness of the tenant organisations

This was a key concern brought up by tenants at the meeting – including this:

- 'I think one of the issues we have in Kingston is our community organisations being decimated. We no longer have a central one like we had with Kingston Federation of Tenants and Residents, which has had to close down. Our resident associations are very few and far between now, when it comes to social housing. And there's not really an organisation that can represent Kingston as a whole. There are people there who say they are there for residents, but they are political parties. There are no resident-led groups at the moment.'

Poor service provision

Concerns raised about service provision as well as the knock-on effects of Brexit, more broadly – including this comment:

- 'The boroughs of Kingston, Croydon and Sutton share a contract when it comes to refuse. One of the major issues is that like all other 'dirty jobs', people have left those jobs due to Brexit and no one's filled the positions because no one wants to do those jobs. It's a French company, so they don't particularly give a damn about what happens here. That's the issue with companies owned by overseas people who don't really care. It's the same with private prisons and developers. A lot more political ploys are playing in the background and impacting people. These companies do a little work and subcontract elsewhere. Everyone's making money but no one is actually looking at the problem and fixing it.

'Brexit added to it and Covid added to it. No one wants to take ownership to do something better for the residents.'

How could the network could best serve tenants in the S London Sub-Region?

From Kingston particularly there was a call for re-build organising capacity at the local and borough-wide levels:

- 'What I've found lately is that in community groups, it's the older generations that make up these groups. Resident associations, etc. — a more mature side of things. There's no one coming in their 40s and 50s and that's due to work commitments and stuff like that. So, how do you get around that and get a big enough force to represent the area to go meetings with the South London Partnership?

'We get questions like 'who are you representing?' and we have no actual basis to go and challenge these aside from being individual people. And unless there's going to be a group that comes together regularly as a kind of federation, I suppose, where do we see this group going.'
- 'In Kingston, it doesn't matter what colour the council is. They tend to do what the central gov does: they say 'we're listening' and then go in the other direction.'
- 'It would be good to have a 'Southern Community Board', something that can help all the boroughs at the same time. We share services, legal, childcare, not just refuse. So having an overarching organisation for the area could be a possible way to go, because we are sharing so much.'
- 'Unless we all know what is going on, there's no point in having conversations with our boroughs, everyone is going to be fighting each other.'

WEST LONDON SUB-REGIONAL MEETING SUMMARY

04 February, 2022

The West London sub-region brings together tenants from **Barnet, Brent, Ealing, Hammersmith & Fulham, Harrow, Hillingdon and Hounslow**, as shown in the map below.



Introduction: These boroughs were grouped together not only because they are geographically located in the Western part of London, but also because the local authorities for these boroughs form a strategic partnership — the [West London Alliance](#).

In this first meeting, leaseholders compared experiences and discussed the various forms and implications of development in their boroughs. We also briefly spoke about the impact of the Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation (OPDC) and HS2 construction in the region.

This sub-region contains 12 opportunity areas and falls within two growth corridors.

Summary of discussion on transport connection issues

Tenants spoke about transport and connection issues from West London, and the fact that transit investment doesn't seem to prioritise the local community. Rather, it's to facilitate transportation to and from Heathrow and Central London. For example:

- 'I can get on [the tube] a couple of stops off Heathrow and I have to stand all the way. And that's the only connection you've got into London. Where I live, we've got no bus connection to Heathrow. Not one bus goes direct.'
- 'There are obvious tensions. Hammersmith & Fulham Council is trying to be very green and anti-car, but it has no control over Transport for London, so there is no synchronisation of policies there.'

The lack of transit options impacts some of West London's most vulnerable community members:

- 'Hounslow and Richmond are all anti-car, but they don't lay on the public transport. My church has a lot of activities going on during the day, but you can't park the car unless you want to pay a fortune. The elderly people want to come, but they can't always come on the buses because they've got mobility issues.'

Regeneration / developments

When asked about regeneration that would benefit the community, West London tenants asked for investment in community and health infrastructure, including the following:

- 'They need more infrastructure - schools and health centres. They knocked down the civic centre and built a big housing estate. They were expecting to have so many thousands in this estate, but it has no car parking stations, very few bus lines, no new schools and no new doctors. And my daughter said, "I can't believe they're not putting in new services for the existing community and children.'"
- There is some planning going on in White City – an area with a lot of high-rise development anyway. There are plans for some new homes and community infrastructure. Local residents from the local authority states have issues about repairs and anti-social behaviour.
- There is some planning going on for White City – an area with a lot of high-rise development anyway. There are plans for some new homes and community infrastructure.

Gentrification

Discussions about gentrification addressed both residential and commercial gentrification. For example, residents shared concerns about local authorities failure to construct desperately-needed social housing:

- 'Some new homes have been reserved for social housing, but the majority is for the private sector or intermediate housing. And like all councils, they've got tons of people on the waiting list. Our council is trying to buy back properties that people bought — they're desperate for housing.'
- 'I think all the building — Hounslow is doing a lot of — is not reducing the council waiting list.'
- 'They've regenerated a lot, and they're doing the empty shops too. They're turning the offices and shops into accommodation. But they're not really suitable for families because there're no gardens or play areas.'

Tenants also spoke about high street and commercial spaces in their boroughs:

- 'We have big shops, and I can understand that it doesn't give local little traders much of a change. But the tax they have to pay to the council for being on the high street — the business rates — it's extortionate. Some shops will close because they can't afford to stay open, or they'll merge into one space. I think the council is strapped for cash, but I think if they want to maintain a vibrant high street centre for people, they need to help small shops.'

Discussion on tenant and leaseholder issues

- 'Issues being raised by tenants are repairs and anti-social behaviour'.
- 'Engagement structures in Hounslow are not great – certainly not what they used to be. The tenant engagement team has been reorganised. The communications team is rubbish. Before the pandemic the council was doing some workshops on estates around works that needed be done, but the pandemic stopped this'.

There was sharing of the differences between the ways that different local authorities format their bills and section 20 notices.

- 'In Hounslow we get a block summary but no details on what the communal repairs are – or where and when these were done. We may get bills three times a year'.

- ‘On major repairs, you need to challenge – we have been able to get discounts in doing this. Things can also be taken to the leaseholder tribunal’.

It was noted that much information for leaseholders can be found on [Leasehold Advisory Service](#) and the [Leasehold Knowledge Partnership](#) websites.

Goals and objectives for the West London Network

- Gathering more information about how different local authorities set out their leaseholder bills and sharing of good practice. Having this online would be useful.
- Having a clinic where tenants can exchange ideas and best practices (for example, how others have successfully engaged the council).
- Bringing more into the network.