

GLA Housing Design Guide SPG – Workshop Note



Introduction

Mae Architects are working with the GLA to develop the new London Housing SPG. The work includes the following three elements:

1. **Forward planning**, up front work the borough should do to assess the character of different parts of their area, and different parts of large sites when appropriate, to set out the type and capacity of housing most appropriate for each.
2. **Typologies and examples**. Mae are working up different housing typologies, explaining basic densities each can reach.
3. **Design guidance**. This third section of the SPG will set the assessment requirements against housing designs issues including car and cycle parking.

Borough Workshop

Working with the GLA and following the 17th October workshop, this note sets out our response to the emerging GLA Housing Design Guide SPG, (the guide) with the GLA team and Mae Architects and facilitated by UDL. The workshop was attended by all the London Boroughs and seeks to help the GLA refine and deliver the guidance ensuring it best fits borough requirements to deliver the Mayor's housing targets.

The emerging guide focuses on housing delivery at two contrasting development scales: large and small scale infill sites. These homes need to be efficiently planned and delivered using the finite supply of available land to deliver unprecedented housing targets.

Well designed large sites, supported by the appropriate level of services and community facilities, can deliver large numbers of homes and provide tangible benefits to existing communities. In many ways delivering larger sites is less challenging; they attract fees that cover the design and planning processes, provide infrastructure to the wider community in the form of CIL and S106, and can include construction management plans to protect the neighbourhood.

Building homes on smaller sites within tight sites and existing communities is more challenging. Whilst providing more bespoke homes tailored to individual circumstances allowing communities to grow closer and develop richer support networks, often fees do not cover costs and within tight sites can increase concerns and objections from neighbours.

However, a wide range of housing tenures and types knitted closer together can create increased footfall for local business and more enriched communities helping to reduce isolation and loneliness.

The workshop discussed a number of the issues for the GLA to address in the next iteration of the guide. These are expanded upon below.

Large sites

The guide should include a more extensive range of housing typologies. Boroughs need clear design guidance on how design quality can be achieved particularly at higher densities within the linear block storey heights of c.7 to 13 storeys – the problematic 'not-quite-tower' typologies.

Delegates cautioned against the use or promotion of housing typologies which provide single aspect dwellings, particularly when sited to the south or along busy streets or within rear courtyards. Cross-ventilation, combating overheating without need for mechanical ventilation and privacy are all important requirements to creating a successful home and single aspect units should be discouraged.

Delegates would like the guide to ensure that housing development contributes towards the delivery of necessary infrastructure and facilities to support the

successful growth of communities and acknowledge the impact of construction and mitigation measures. These are key aspects of planning for good growth and should be emphasised within the guide.

Small sites

There were concerns with the day to day funding and skills required in house to guide and support the planning of these sites. Planning fees do not adequately cover the cost of pre- and application discussions as well as addressing neighbours concerns. SIL doesn't provide funding of services and any section 106 contributions are only for a direct contribution to the site. The guide should set out a mechanism by which a development should fund high quality homes.

With an increase in target numbers for small sites, the boroughs were concerned that relaxing permitted development would lead to extensions to existing homes rather than providing additional units on these sites. The guide needs to address this concern and offer solutions.

The guidance should provide a mechanism to capture contribution towards affordable housing, open space and education/health/other facilities.

Character assessment methodology

Boroughs would like the guide to include a clear methodology for undertaking character assessments.

The methodology approach would usefully include PTAL data and access to services using WebCat and be clear on how to best consider local accessibility alongside long distance accessibility, so filtered permeability opportunities, real walking and cycling catchments (not 800m circles) and how to increase and improve these in line with increased densities.

Outer London Boroughs

Outer London Boroughs requested greater support and guidance in order to enable delivery.

Streets

Great streets support great places. Streets support the built development and accommodate access, wayfinding, servicing, amenity and parking (bicycle and vehicular).

Providing a series of diagrams and street sections within the guidance will be invaluable in helping to deliver successful new places, streets and homes, checking

on capacity of streets and public spaces to accommodate required movement for the different typologies will be time well spent.

We strongly suggest that additional work is required to make sure street and public realm design requirements are covered – Healthy Street indicators, on-street cycle and vehicle parking design, pavement, carriageway and junction design, planting, seating, play space, on street selling/eating/drinking, level and shared spaces, lighting, waste collection, delivery and servicing requirements using/from the street etc.

A very short, up to date London version of Manual for Streets would be helpful for boroughs to create good neighbourhoods.

Finally

We very much welcomed the GLA's approach to dialogue and exchange and hope these comments are helpful in delivering an exemplary guide for the delivery of great homes in the capital. We look forward to reviewing the next iteration of the document and supporting Good Growth in London.

We welcome a continued dialogue between the GLA and London Boroughs to discuss and address these issues.

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