



Courtesy: Mark Warren

Housing on Small Sites

16/03/2022

- **Small sites development is due to provide 23% of the London plan 10-year target.** But the benefits go beyond numbers to form a key role in good place-making, with a significant incremental impact. Providing multiple small schemes across a borough can achieve many additional aims – improving opportunities for play, increasing connectivity by connecting streets, enhancing social and community infrastructure, and increasing diversity of typology, age and use in areas that lack it.
- **A small site can be thought of as anything up to around a third of the area of a football pitch.** The small size may suggest that sites can be easier to deliver, but they require more care and consideration, with a good due diligence and understanding of the constraints to turn them into opportunities. There are a number of ways in which sites can make the most use of tenure, design, density, site assembly, construction methods and delivery partners to ensure good outcomes.
- **The use of guidance may be a key tool in enabling more democratic development,** fostering collective development by neighbours within a supportive framework. Boroughs have increasingly taken a strategic approach with many good examples of planning guidance, with further guidance planned by the GLA – in time these may also influence the way local plans are worded and help shape the future London Plan to further support small sites to achieve their full potential. Planning teams can also support good practice by ensuring Design Officers attend pre app discussions.
- **Key areas of focus include getting access and communal spaces right as they often make a small site tick.** By rethinking the way spaces interact with each other on a small site you can give people other benefits that you wouldn't be able to achieve on a standard site. Building quality is also key, a scheme on a backland lives or dies on the quality of its construction.
- **The practice of delivering small sites is very sensitive to the circumstances of the site and surrounding area.** The ongoing conversation between small sites delivery and the design of small sites guidance and codes will help to ensure that borough tools



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give the flexible framework needed, avoiding oversimplification but forming a baseline and a trellis to encourage opportunities to be realised.

- **There is a disproportionate amount of risk involved in developing small sites.** In an effort to de-risk small site development, Lewisham set out some clear and unambiguous guidelines for this type of development in their [Small Sites SPD](#). Lane sites in particular are very challenging to develop but potentially have a big impact on the ability to deliver new homes. For this reason, Lewisham has [Mew and Alley Guidance](#), as part of their Small Sites SPD.
- Merton has developed a [Small Sites Toolkit SPD](#) to assist in the design process, to encourage applicants to think holistically about design, and deliver better quality planning applications. It includes Design Guidance, Case Studies, and a Design and Access Statement Template.
- The [Small Site Design Codes](#) set out in the London Plan Guidance draft can pro-actively support well-designed new homes by providing clarity and certainty over the design and quality of small site residential development. They are area-wide rather than site-specific design codes and use character types as a basis for their application. The GLA are consulting on four pieces of London Plan Guidance, including the aforementioned, [here](#).

Speakers:

Russell Curtis, Founding Director, RCKA Architects

Alan Smithies, Senior Strategic Planner, GLA

Mark Warren, Urban Design and Development Officer, LB Merton

Ed Buckingham, Senior Associate Planner, Stantec

Hugh McEwen, Founder, Office S&M

Kieron Stephens, Associate Architect, Autor Architecture

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Attendees: 79