**UDL Intensification Debate – 30th April 2019**

At the Intensification Debate we set about defining the terms 'intensification' and 'densification'. It was evident that the two terms are not interchangeable and in short intensification is about enriching lives and densification is about increasing numbers.

Here are a few definitions from the delegates:

**Intensification**

is something for everyone, more living, working, playing.

is about creating spaces that evolve to respond to peoples' needs.

is the optimisation of land or space to integrate live, work and play.

will enable places to provide a flexible mix of uses to meet the needs of a growing community and to adapt to future days.

is enrichment of neighbours and communities, not just the built environment.  It is messy and involves accessibility (all in one place) interaction, flexible space, a 24/7 approach, collaboration and multiple finance sources.

**Densification**

is about units, numbers, targets, siloes, build and leave; a project-based approach and fragmented financing.



*Figure 1: How to manage different tensions – Yolanda Barnes*

As one speaker said, 'we know people live in neighbourhoods, not housing 'units', and that neighbourhoods need 'messy stuff' like builders yards if they are going to work properly. No builders yards, no local plumbers'.

Despite general consensus that we need intensification not densification, both speakers and delegates seemed to think we are pushing for the latter potentially at the expense of communities and individuals. This is in part because our money system tends to focus on capital growth and development return rather than sustainable value based on long term stewardship, revenue and community interests. This financial approach, combined with the way we focus on housing number targets in our planning system, makes intensification less achievable.

To help understand how we can deliver better intensification we asked delegates to note potential positive and negative outcomes at the city, neighbourhood and individual level. This is what they said:

**City level**



| Good for city | Bad for city |
|---|---|
| <ul><li>Sustainable and potential to rethink how we live, our view of what urban life is all about</li><li>More homes built, potential to meet demand and solve housing crisis</li><li>More potential for viable public transport services/improvements</li><li>Potential to reduce car dependency and better integrate places/communities</li><li>Potential to reduce pollution (linked to cars?)</li></ul> | <ul><li>Anxiety about evolution of intense places and overcrowding – politically challenging to justify</li><li>Takes longer than single political terms/needs cross-party long-term support</li><li>Over or under provision if planning not flexible and cope with changing demands for different types of spaces and buildings</li><li>Views and townscape impact from tall buildings</li></ul> |

- Better public health (from walking)
- Reduces pressure to build in sensitive areas like green belt or conservation areas
- Developer funded model/potential for profit and viable schemes that will be delivered
- Ownership of site/land consolidated
- Use of funding/grants to create more diversity of opportunity
- Pushes for innovation and improvement in management of places and people

- Eroding existing hierarchy of town centres
- Risk viability drives outcomes which are not human in scale or deliver potential intensification benefits for communities and individuals
- Wealth from development not shared, greater inequality
- Gravitational pull towards inner London
- Little proof that which is promised is actually delivered – from infrastructure to better life-chances
- Pushes housing costs up not down?

**Neighbourhood level**



| Good for neighbourhood | Bad for neighbourhood |
|---|---|
| <ul><li>Creates accessible places</li><li>Makes areas more dynamic</li><li>Creates distinctive character/sense of place</li><li>Brings together diverse lifestyles</li><li>Allows for greener, more interesting streets</li><li>Local shops/services more viable</li><li>Means we can build streets not roads</li><li>Potential for knowledge and resource</li></ul> | <ul><li>Potential segregation of new and old communities</li><li>No space for opportunities/starting new businesses</li><li>Urban heat island and water management problems</li><li>No space for 'failure' experimentation</li><li>Problems/worries of poor communal stewardship of shared amenity and play-space/facilities</li></ul> |

| | |
|---|---|
| • sharing within community<br>• Safer places with more 'eyes on streets' | • Place management is intense and needs lots of investment/leadership/coordination<br>• Local interests can be squashed<br>• Parking problems, more people, more cars<br>• Pressure/demand from more people on shared facilities and services<br>• Increased servicing, deliveries and waste collection to be accommodated<br>• Exacerbates existing problems in an area<br>• Urban/suburban sprawl if done in wrong place without non car travel opportunities for all journey types<br>• Tensions between planned and unplanned activities<br>• Does not leave space/opportunities to change in future and respond to new challenges |

## Individual level



| Good for individuals | Bad for individuals |
|---|---|
| • Potential to secure a home/more access to affordable homes<br>• Better opportunities to work near home (live/work balance) and local job opportunities<br>• More 'community' to be part of<br>• Less loneliness and isolation<br>• Healthier/more active/more social interaction/ Can walk to work, shop and play<br>• More on your door step, saves on travel time/better quality of life | • Neighbour conflict<br>• Intrusive – lack of privacy<br>• General sensory overload/lack of calm<br>• Noisy<br>• Less of daylight/views/direct sunlight<br>• Lack of connection with nature and wildlife. Less biodiversity<br>• Lack of human scale buildings/surroundings<br>• People have to give up their amenity/space/privacy – 'privileges' they have historically enjoyed.  Don't see why they should<br>• Potentially more incompatible and annoying neighbours – clash of values/ways of life<br>• Loss of identity as an individual within large number of people<br>• Loss of local character – ends up looking |

- and feeling like everywhere else
- Poor or restricted servicing/deliveries/access due to
- movement and activity restrictions

*Figure 2: What is the difference between intensification and densification?*

Maybe unsurprisingly, while the lists show about the same number of benefits and dis-benefits at the city wide, strategic level, people noted more potential problems for neighbourhoods and individuals. In general, strategic scale benefits revolve around building more homes and making a case for infrastructure investments, while neighbourhoods can be troubled by competition for services and space and the logistics of making an intense community work well, and individuals can face challenges to their everyday living conditions.

The table is made up of comments from housing and planning professionals. Some delegates noted that when dealing with intensification plans and planning applications the general public are more sensitive to the potential dis-benefits at the neighbourhood and individual level than any potential benefits. This might be because benefits are too remote and disconnected to their day to day lives, because we have not planned and delivered enough intensification that actually delivers visible benefits. Or where we have delivered good outcomes it does not get much public attention.

If we want more public support for intensification, then maybe we need to tackle the values, assumptions and experiences which colour our view of intensification and densification. Delegates noted that common aspirations for a detached home with garden and parking space clash against others who embrace intensive urban areas. It is not particularly helpful to say one attitude is right, another wrong, but a better approach would be to try and understand the reasons behind such views and design intensification that provides an

attractive alterative to the traditional suburban model that celebrates and makes clear the benefits for neighbourhoods and individuals. This might mean being much clearer about:

- how visual and noise privacy will be ensured
- the ability to personalise the home and home environment
- opportunities to connect with, use, grow and enjoy plants and animals
- how people will be able to feel in control of their home environment and feel safe
- approaches to managing spaces shared with others
- how people will be able to move around and the realistic ability to get to everything we need to without the private car
- how change will enrich people's social lives, job opportunities and opportunities to interact and enjoy the company of others

The best way to understand and work to deliver good intensification for a place is to ask those who live and know the area. This applies to changes to housing estates, infill development in suburbs or extensions to existing communities. Approaches which dismiss concerns because people do not appreciate strategic benefits are less likely to receive backing.

What would happen if we started conversations with an understanding of how people feel about existing areas, and build the intensification plan around their wishes for improvements, rather than presenting housing numbers created from seemingly remote strategic and financial drivers? Maybe then we could better deliver benefits for neighbourhoods and individuals and design and manage out potential dis-benefits?

All this of course could reduce the amount of homes and money development can bring. Are we prepared to take this hit? Should/could developers be encouraged to think that sensitive intensification is in line with their revenue, especially as we are starting to add an economic value to social benefits?

We also discussed the role of streets in intensification. Streets are one of London's biggest assets and need to take on important roles to support intensification. They provide outdoor living and space for communities to integrate as well as needing to accommodate all the day to day access, servicing and other functions that facilitate successful intensive neighbourhoods. Streets act as the arteries to neighbourhoods – providing air, light and space for people, nature and places to breathe grow and develop.

**Speakers**

- Martin Tedder, Spatial Planning, TfL
- Yolande Barnes, Bartlett Real Estate
- Manisha Patel, PRP & Mayor's Design Advocate
- David Ogunmuyiwa, Architecture Doing Place & Mayor's Design Advocate

**Upcoming events of interest**

- 27th Jun Applying the Small Sites Policy 1
- 10th Sep Applying the Tall Building Policy
- 25th Sep Applying the Small Sites Policy 2

We're keen to continue this debate at future events. If you would like to contribute to the discussion or have any comments or questions, please email us at mailto:info@urbandesignlondon.com