

CAMPAIGN FOR A LIVEABLE LONDON

SETTING THE SCENE: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



“To save the countryside we have to save our cities”

Harley Sherlock, Past President of CPRE London

For over 30 years, CPRE and CPRE London have campaigned for good quality, attractive homes in urban areas, while making efficient use of land and improving local services and amenities (e.g. CPRE London, 2006; CPRE, 2008a; 2008b). We recognise that pressures on London and the surrounding region are greater than ever as it strives to maintain its role as a competitive global centre and accommodate growth.

In summary the Campaign for a Liveable London will:

- promote a 'Smart Urbanism' approach to the London Plan, which encourages local solutions to increasing housing and infrastructure need;
- promulgate community-led planning and sensitive building to improve the quality of life of London's residents;
- provide guidance to help active citizens, developers and officials to design and implement those building developments which work best.

This review has drawn on literature from academic research, government agencies, think-tanks and other sources concerned with London's housing and quality of life issues. It is divided into three sections: liveability; London's housing context; and compact neighbourhoods. Although not a full systematic review of all the relevant literature, it provides the findings and perspectives which we need to guide our future research and associated campaign work.

The 2013/14 London context

Projections suggest that the London population will reach an all-time high of almost 9 million by 2016 and continue to grow strongly in the following thirty years. With a rising population, London is under increasing pressure to deliver sufficient housing and infrastructural services. London councils are also facing challenges as a result of public funding cuts, whilst needing to respond to growing service demands. The 2011 London Plan set a target for building 322,100 additional homes between 2011 and 2021 (GLA, 2013). Later estimates call for 50,000 new homes in London each year for the next 10 years (Nathaniel Lichfield & Partners, 2013).

The 2011 Plan has set 'top down' housing targets for the 32 boroughs and the City of London pressing developers to build at higher residential densities. At the same time, the Localism Act 2011 has offered communities new powers to produce neighbourhood plans to inform development in their local areas. These 'bottom up' plans have the same legal weight as the development frameworks produced by London boroughs. With support and guidance neighbourhood planning powers could provide an opportunity for London's citizens to take a stronger lead in the design of their own neighbourhoods.

Our *Campaign for a Liveable London* acknowledges the tensions that can exist between these top-down and bottom-up initiatives in delivering housing and neighbourhoods, and is seeking solutions that work for all Londoners.

The language of liveability

The term 'livability' dates back to the 1970s in the US where new policies aimed to combat large scale urban sprawl and resultant environmental degradation. In early 2000 the UK Government's 'Liveability' agenda (with an 'e') recognised the valuable contribution of 'good quality' design in local environments. It took a rather narrow approach to built environment quality, focussing on people's immediate concerns about the everyday local environment e.g. traffic, graffiti, dogs etc.

For the purpose of the campaign, liveability is defined as the quality of urban life, both in the everyday and through one's life course. Encouraging citizens to make their places more liveable is a transformative process. It challenges all interested parties to work for inclusive design and management of the local environment so as to improve quality of life over time. Findings of the review suggest that there is a need for more transparency to allow citizens to identify all the actors involved and engage with each in enhancing neighbourhood liveability.

Our review examines how liveability can be nurtured in ways which are relevant to built environment professionals. We have given some emphasis to what is known about ways to develop more affordable housing in compact neighbourhoods which provide for residents of mixed incomes and tenures.

Housing affordability in London

The robustness of London's housing market contributes to the UK economy, but greater investment in affordable housing for London workers is vital. Various groups currently have large scale unmet housing need. There is growing evidence of a broadly two-tier London – an expensive inner core and a second tier of more affordable outer boroughs and analyses of housing should take account of this difference. While the Private Rental Sector (PRS) is growing most rapidly in London, options for home-seekers are restricted by a narrow range of housing types and tenures.

According to the literature reviewed, major barriers to better housing supply include locked-up ("land-banked" or permission-blocked) public and private sites; inhibitions of developers due to the risks in house building, and the role of overseas investment. Potential solutions offered by policy writers are varied. They include: linking transport & housing investment; imposing more regulation on private landlords; revision of rules for Affordable Rent schemes; linking planning consent to delivery targets; encouraging the design of whole-lifetime housing; pressing developers to offer wider market choices, and finally, stronger local government leadership with wider spending powers.

For the purpose of our campaign, an appreciation of the need to revisit the treatment of housing affordability will go hand in hand with new initiatives on a wider range of wellbeing and environmental concerns. These issues must not be sidestepped during the implementation of consolidated building standards and new housing targets, as they are important contributors to the quality of urban life. More compact neighbourhoods can offer well-planned and inclusive housing solutions, enhancing the amenities both inside homes and in their immediate environs, as developers and designers work together with communities on designs to improve quality of life in urban neighbourhoods.

Compact neighbourhoods – the CPRE London view

Former CPRE London president and architect, Harley Sherlock showed how the densities provided by tower blocks can also be achieved without exceeding three or four stories. Furthermore, a number of writers have called for a return to the issues of how to reconceptualise and measure housing density (e.g. Campoli and McLean, 2007; Boyko, 2011). The matrix of generally approved densities provided in the London Plan does not demonstrate how to secure optimum liveability. A renewed effort is needed to create the right densities in the right places, designed in the right way. The resultant outcomes must be liveable neighbourhoods rather than a focus on number of individual units.

To build on the work of Harley Sherlock, our campaign will focus on five ‘liveability’ aspects of compact neighbourhoods as uncovered in the literature: provision and access to services; mix of tenure; community sustainability; brownfield development; perceptions of density. We will consider and commend these aspects of compact neighbourhoods in the light of London’s changing social and environmental concerns.

Review – initial findings

The initial findings from the large literature review indicate:

- *The quality of housing as well as quantity remains key* - Housing provision and site densities are clearly key dimensions of neighbourhood and city-wide liveability. However, neither housing provision nor density data should be viewed in isolation. Any evaluation of supply, affordability and density should include wider neighbourhood concerns and take account of a wider range of quality of life and environmental issues.
- *Linking formal and informal processes* - The CPRE London Campaign for a Liveable London calls for a reconceptualization of the term liveability that links top-down policy and practice with community-led initiatives.
- *Clarifying neighbourhood liveability* - A liveable neighbourhood is one that affords good everyday experiences and long term quality of life. It also supports new opportunities for local creativity and ownership which could be missed by overly rigid, homogenising regulation.
- *Future research on promoting liveability* - This review opens up further questions as to the processes of interaction between the various actors who have a need, role and responsibility in enhancing liveability in the city.

This report is part of CPRE London’s Campaign for a Liveable London – seeking people centred solutions for London’s housing crisis. For a copy of the full literature review contact: Office@cprelondon.org.uk