GOOD GROWTH BY DESIGN

RECOVERY

ROUNDTABLE

CHILD-FRIENDLY CITY

MAYOR OF LONDON

The *Good Growth by Design (GGbD) Recovery Roundtable* series invites Mayor's Design Advocates and other external experts to discuss the most pertinent topics facing London's built environment in the wake of the global health crisis and its ensuing social and economic impacts.

This fourth *Recovery Roundtable* was held on 8th July, chaired by Philip Graham, Executive Director Good Growth, GLA and focused on the child-friendly city. Deputy Mayor for Education and Childcare, Joanne McCartney framed the conversation with policy context. Fourteen participants, including Mayor's Design Advocates, Peer Outreach Worker and other practitioners from the public, private and civic sectors each contributed their ideas for how London could respond to the Covid-19 crisis to address the challenge of creating a safe and empowering place for children and young people in our cities.

Participants addressed ideas including independent mobility, participation in decision-making, access to technology, infrastructural improvements, the role of schools, as well as how the principles of a child-friendly city intersect with other critical questions of inequality, mental and physical health, and sustainability.

The following is a summary of key reflections and propositions for how London can react to this challenge, and the role that the Greater London Authority should play in the recovery.

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DINAH BORNAT
ZCD Architects, Mayor's Design Advocate

Implementation of findings: 'It's worth looking back to January [before the Covid crisis], when we were proposing a supplementary planning guidance [on child-friendly cities]. Those plans have been put on hold, but it would be good to review where we think we were going, because I don't see a massive take up on these ideas across the boroughs.'

Reflection: 'In 20 years time, what do we wish we could have done differently? From where I am standing, it was quite horrific the way in which children and young people were not only locked in, but their lives were sacrificed in a way for this pandemic, and this was hardly mentioned.'

Independent mobility: 'It's fantastic to see all the school streets, but that's about getting to school. The big gap for me is understanding how the whole city can meet the independent mobility requirements of children and young people, particularly when you have a fear of moving around. We just didn't anticipate this massive drop in their independence.'

Participation: 'Working with youth centres and play workers through this in the short to medium term would be really helpful, because they are seeing the issues that young people are facing in their daily lives, and they are also a gateway to speaking to them.'

LUCY MUSGRAVE
Publica, Mayor's Design Advocate

Rights: 'The right that children have to the city and to play has been seriously overlooked in this crisis. The government advice on what has been sanctioned for exercise did not include play. The basis of the [Making London Child-friendly] report was that independent mobility is a rights-based issue that is essential for mental and physical and social development.'

Inequality: 'The horror of this pandemic has revealed the total inequality of our city and our built environment. We need a deep dive to understand what has happened [in the crisis], and particularly how we can address issues of race, gender and class, because it's all been revealed, and there's no way we can avoid those issues.'

Research: 'We need research, and we need children and young people to lead this research, gathering data in terms of what their experience has been over the past few months.'

Super-local: 'The scale of the neighbourhood and the street is now alive in our imaginations as is a wholly revitalised public realm. Local authorities are thinking much more boldly and creatively about flexible-use responses, particularly in terms of streets and outdoor spaces. If all of those super-local initiatives were connected and we joined up communal space, public space, and a network of safe routes, we would have achieved a child-friendly city.'

Infrastructure: 'Much of the interventions being made around the world – widened pavements and cycling infrastructure – are employing the key child-friendly principle of removing danger from the public realm, rather than removing people from a dangerous public realm.'

GABRIELLE ABADI
LB Hackney

Cars returning: 'Residents now know what low volumes of traffic now looks and feels like, and the many benefits associated with it. But unfortunately there are indications that car use could exceed pre lockdown levels, with impacts on air quality and traffic, which particularly affect children and young people.'

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Accelerated plans: 'Most of our plans are pre-existing, but have been accelerated by Covid. For example, we are introducing modal filters to create low-traffic neighbourhoods, a number of segregated cycle routes, and wider pavements in town centres.'

Schools: 'We see schools becoming the heart of the neighbourhood, and then we can build out low-traffic neighbourhoods from there.'

ALPA DEPANI
LB Waltham Forest

Policy: 'We are currently putting together the revised local plan for 2020 to 2035. We are looking specifically at how we integrate child-friendly cities, with an emphasis on public realm, greening, pedestrian-friendly environments, and child-friendly development.'

Research: 'The regeneration team have secured funding for research into making North Waltham Forest a child-friendly district. This includes an audit of existing play provision, connectivity from schools and play facilities, identifying gaps across age groups, and inequalities across the borough.'

Bike-friendly: 'Waltham Forest is a bike-friendly borough. This includes new cycle lanes, point closures, and street greening. It was driven by a desire to make active travel more attractive and reduce air pollution, but another benefit has been making streets safer for children too.'

Funding: 'I think it's important to talk about funding. We had a number of projects in the pipeline which have now been halted because there's no funding from TFL available, for obvious reasons. And the research has been postponed too due to resourcing in the wake of Covid. But the will is there, and the thinking is there.'

PRECIOUS AZUBUIKE
Peer Outreach Worker, GLA

Privilege: 'When we look at quarantine or social distancing, it is a form of privilege – you have to have the technology, the ability to connect to the internet. Not everyone has that, so it can be quite difficult.'

Space: 'My quality of life and wellbeing has completely changed. In some ways it's positive, I have more time to focus on exercise or to spend on myself, but I also feel quite constricted. I'm from a big family, and I feel like I don't have any space.'

JAVAUN BANCE
Peer Outreach Worker, GLA

Stay engaged: 'One of the biggest things I've been pushing for during this period is to keep young people engaged, to keep their mind on something else. We are taking in so much information through social media, through general media, rather than actually going out to do something.'

Isolated: 'I think everyone feels quite isolated. I'm seeing a different vibe and energy in the community. Everyone is feeling de-motivated and not having the same passion or pride as they did before lockdown. It's important that they keep engaged with people that actually value their time and care.'

AKIL SCAFE-SMITH
Resolve Collective

Co-production: 'How do we bake in co-production to our design and management processes? Co-production is not just a way of designing or producing something, but it can also be a way of managing [a place] in the long term.'

Integration: 'We've got an extensive library of examples about how to do these co-production processes, but what we don't have is a way to ensure that it's not just bolted on. This is a big challenge post-Covid, as it could be the first thing that falls out of the bottom. We need to learn how to do so in scarcity.'

MARTINA MINA
Global Generation

Time slots: 'The main space we manage is a community garden, which is a vital space for connecting young people and families to nature. This is challenging with current restrictions, we are managing now by allowing families in with time slots.'

Co-design: 'We are also focused on the co-design process for our future sites. We have started sessions online, which is a challenge, and as Precious mentioned, also is a privilege [in terms of access to technology].'

DAISY FROUD
Mayor's Design Advocate

Speed: 'There's a tremendous pressure now to deliver projects, a sense that we can't hold up the programme, even though it's possible to work at a slower, paper-based way. And that worries me because people are falling out of the process, because they may not feel comfortable contributing via Zoom.'

Inclusion: 'This digital mode of engagement also means I'm having far fewer conversations with a far less diverse range of people. Normally when I'm on the ground, you have all those incidental conversations and you build up relationships with people.'

Participation: 'Moving forward, we have to focus on young people's engagement at the level of city or neighbourhood governance. The setting up of genuine youth design review panels, or genuine youth parliaments, to support young people to have a meaningful voice.'

Creativity: 'With schools closed, children have learned to self-educate, coming up with ideas that have nothing to do with the curriculum. It's a reminder of how much energy, imagination, and creativity they have, and why we should ensure they are involved in conversations around city production and planning.'

RICHARD LAVINGTON
Maccreanor Lavington, Mayor's Design Advocate

Public space: 'During the crisis, public space has had the ability to mitigate some of the inequalities that people have, such as a lack of outdoor space. This has really brought to the fore the importance of public space.'

Rapid change: 'I think we need to grasp this as an opportunity for rapid change, to claim more space for the public realm from the car, for walking and for cycling.'

Consultation: 'I'm aware that design processes take frustratingly long periods of time, particularly ones that are going to properly and legitimately consult everyone. But most importantly and rapidly, we need to make space for these things to happen, so that they can happen over the time they need to take and be done properly.'

LIZA FIOR
Muf architecture/art , Mayor's Design Advocate

Film: 'The film is of two children playing with scooters at 8pm in a socially distanced way at King's Crescent. And it really articulates the value of making spaces as a playable public realm rather than dedicated playgrounds, because all playgrounds are locked.'

Advocacy: 'The value of these kinds of spaces is strong, but I don't think anybody is shouting loudly enough. We have to make it clear to central government and people working at local level that this is infrastructure, and it's just as important as these major schemes.'

Participation: 'We have to involve the carers, as well as the children, because the carers have to – from the moment the child is a baby – feel comfortable to be out with that child in their locality. It's not enough to just say 'oh this street is child-friendly', if there isn't that culture developed.'

Space standards: 'If we remember that play is the work of the child, then how does that work at home get accommodated? I suggest that every planning application requires drawings of children at play.'

SOWMYA PARTHASARATHY
Arup, Mayor's Design Advocate

Prioritise: 'Covid has allowed authorities and governments to prioritise what they need to do in their cities and implement innovations at record speed.'

Pearls: 'I wanted to traipse through some nice examples of child-friendly design from around the world. Imagine them as 'pearls', and what would it look like if we could string them all together in London?'

Examples: 'In Milan, they are building 35km of cycle paths in response to Covid; in San Francisco, they are converting streets into 'slow streets'; in Melbourne, they are building climbing walls in underpasses; in Brighton they have 'park and stride', where you walk the final leg to school; in Boulder, Colorado they have the first child-friendly city maps; and in Singapore they have bus stops with swings, designed to make children feel welcome and independent.'

TIM GILL
Rethinking Childhood

Sustainable: 'I feel like we're getting a bit bogged down in details here. Nobody's talked about climate change yet. A sustainable neighbourhood – more compact, more liveable, more equitable – is a child-friendly neighbourhood. We don't need to worry about the details.'

Action: 'We don't need to ask children and young people what the basic principles of child-friendly design are. We know what they are. I'm worried that an over-focus on the details of children's formal engagement with decision-making actually undermines delivery, and takes energy away.'

Moral case: 'Tackling traffic is really tricky, but bringing children's voices into the way that you morally make the case for reducing traffic is really powerful. And many cities around the world – Fortaleza, Tirana, Ghent – have shown that.'

PAUL HOCKER
London Play

Play streets: 'We pioneered play streets back in 2009, and we've seen how you can change attitudes on a street level quite convincingly once you get the confidence of the children and the adults. And I think that's what's needed now [as part of the recovery], to give people a sense that it's okay for their children to travel independently.'

Play quarters: 'Don't think of children's mobility as a London-wide thing. You want a patchwork quilt, little areas that people feel safe in, which then build up.'
Schools: 'Schools are at the heart of this play quarters idea. They have the network of exactly the people who you want to engage.'

FURTHER READING

The following resources were highlighted during the discussion:

Making London Child-friendly report

Designing a City for all Londoners: Good Growth by Design compendium

'Mobility Justice: The Politics of Movement in an Age of Extremes', Mimi Sheller

Every child a healthy weight – 10 ambitions for London report

Prof Sam Cartwright-Hatton, Dr Kathryn Lester, Prof Helen Dodd & others, 'Play First: Supporting Children's Social and Emotional Wellbeing During and After Lockdown'

NACTO: 'Street for Pandemic Response & Recovery'

Mayor's Design Advocates, Advocate Organisations and GLA staff are inputting into a shared repository of literature, which is a useful resource in framing built environment issues in the COVID context.

CASE STUDIES

The following case studies were raised in the discussion:

Milan Open streets initiative
San Francisco SFMTA's Slow Streets
Park and Stride scheme, Brighton and Hove city council
Boulder Colorado Kid-Friendly Map
Singapore bus stop design
P'tit Vélib - Paris Children's bike rental
Children-at-play signage Japan
Open Street, Brooklyn, NYC
School Streets, LB Hackney

UPCOMING ROUNDTABLES

Public realm
Housing design

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