

Planning Committee

11 March 2014

Transcript Item 3: The Density of New Housing Development in London

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): We are going to begin today with Paul Watling giving us an opening statement. I think before I do that I would like to bring in our guests, starting perhaps from the furthest end. Please just tell us and our watching audience who you are and just a couple of lines on what you do.

Colin Wilson (Senior Manager, Planning Decisions, GLA): I am Colin Wilson, I am the Senior Manager of the Development Projects Team and we refer planning applications to the Mayor; and also deal with the production of the Mayor's opportunity area for planning frameworks for major regeneration sites such as Vauxhall Nine Elms, White City, Earls Court and Old Oak Common. We are also responsible for schemes that the Mayor chooses to call in, Mount (Mt) Pleasant and City Road being a couple of recent cases. Our role is basically to advise the Mayor of compliance with his London plan and also to negotiate with developers, including housing developers, on issues around density, quality of design, social infrastructure, etc.

Will McKee CBE (Chair, Tilfen Land and the Outer London Commission): Good morning, Will McKee, I am Chair of the Mayor's Outer London Commission. We have looked, in our last two or three exercises, at densification in outer London; and we have recommended principles, which I think have been brought into the amendments for the plans which have been produced. We have also looked at densification, more recently, in town centres in outer London and again we have proposals which we have made to the Mayor. I also chair a property company, which has significant residential holdings, predominantly in outer London; and experience of how the viability and sales volumes has impacts upon the kind of densities and tenures that you can provide in housing schemes. Perhaps I should have mentioned, under the Mayor's hat, we have also looked at opportunity areas and areas of intensification.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Excellent.

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): My name is David Birkbeck, I work for a tiny social enterprise called Design for Homes. I must stress that I am not an architect, I am more of an analyst; and I look at schemes as-built and how they work and what kinds of issues arise from those. A lot of my experience is just based on visiting developments, endlessly looking around to see what works and what does not.

Andy von Bradsky (Chairman, PRP Architects and Chair of the RIBA Housing Group): Good morning, everybody. My name is Andy von Bradsky, I am the Chair of PRP a large multi-disciplinary architectural-led practice that specialises in housing. We have undertaken a number of master plans and designs through to completion in London, including high density and low density. We were, as a practice, involved in a number of advisory committees and had published the Super Density Report, which David (Birkbeck) also published. I have been heavily involved in housing standards at a national level, as part of a challenge panel and at the London level too. I am also the Chair of the RIBA Housing Group.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Just to be clear you are here for how long in this meeting?

Andy von Bradsky (Chairman, PRP Architects and Chair of the RIBA Housing Group): I am afraid I have to leave at 11am.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Yes, we just all need to be conscious of that. Thank you.

Andy von Bradsky (Chairman, PRP Architects and Chair of the RIBA Housing Group): Thank you very much.

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): Good morning, my name is Nicholas Boys Smith. I am the Director of Create Street, which is also a tiny new social enterprise, which exists to make the case for the streets and against too much high-rise and big complex multi-storey building. We do that through research, through lobbying for policy changes, through consulting to developers and we hope that by actually getting into development ourselves, to demonstrate what should be done. We launched with a publication last year called *Create Streets* which made the case linking academic research on the correlations between built form and social outcome and very long-term value appreciation. We published in October of last year a short report looking at elements of the London Plan and of the Housing Standards Code, which we believe biases the system against what people most want; and we will be publishing our third report imminently, which is looking partly at some of the current regenerations in London and, partly making the case for new ways to finance certain redevelopment of the estates.

Richard Lavington (Maccleanor Lavington Architects): I am Richard Lavington, Maccleanor Lavington Architects. We are an architectural practice particularly working on housing within London. We also worked with the Greater London Authority (GLA) on preparing the Housing Density Study and are currently working on a study looking at how growth can be accommodated within London's town centres, along with the GLA, obviously.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Thank you very much. You can see that we have a really excellent range of experts, with people having something in common but also having very different perspectives as well, which I hope will make for a very rich conversation.

Now, Paul, if you could introduce the subject that would help.

Paul Watling (Executive Director of Secretariat): I just have a very, very brief presentation I would like to show for Members. I would like to stress it is for the benefit of Members and anybody watching the meeting, rather than our guests. I do not want you to think I am trying to teach you anything.

All this presentation does is set the scene for today's meeting and introduce some of the different approaches to managing housing density and some of the implications for London's open forum. The context, as ever, is London's increasing population. It is projected to rise to around about 10.5 million by 2041. If the strategic objections of the plan stay the same, in as much as accommodating Londoners' growth within its boundaries without encroaching on the greenbelt or London's open spaces, London's population density will increase by about 29%, up from something around 52 persons per hectare now to around 67 persons per hectare.

In terms of what that means for housing density we are quoting here a report from GLA from 2003, Housing for a Compact City; where it was noted that there is still a profound wariness about high density, because of the assumed association with high-rise. That is something we will be talking about later on in the meeting.

This graphic should be familiar to all students of planning, architecture and local design. It simply shows different approaches of accommodating the same density on the same plot area. In this respect it is 75 dwellings per hectare, but in the top example it is accommodated using a courtyard type development, enclosing public and semi-public space. The middle example is the familiar high-rise tower block approach,

surrounded by public open space. The third example is the more traditional street pattern we are familiar with in London, in terms of streets with houses fronting very close to the road and private gardens at the rear.

The next few slides are just some examples of different densities of housing schemes in London, illustrating the different forms that can be achieved and the different densities in terms of dwellings per hectare and habitable rooms.

This first one is from Oldfield Road in Stoke Newington. It is the familiar one that we know in London, Victorian terraces built around the 1880s. It has a density of around 80 dwellings per hectare, which I believe is the kind of densities on average London is building at, at the moment; but it does have a fairly high level of habitable rooms per hectare.

This one is in the Greenwich Peninsula. It has double the amount of dwellings as the previous one but interestingly a lower number of buildings per hectare.

The third one again has a similar density in terms of dwellings per hectare as the previous example, but a much higher level of habitable rooms and that is approaching or even exceeding the first example.

The third one is a similar level of density as the previous one but, as you can see, the open design process is much different with blocks and a fair amount of public open space.

The fifth example is a step up really, in terms of density. That is a site just off Kingsland Road in Hackney and it is sandwiched between a canal and a busy road. That is 328 dwellings per hectare and a significantly higher number of habitable rooms.

The last one is a step up again. It is Dolphin Square in Pimlico. It was built in the 1930s. It has by far the highest density of all the examples and a density approaching 1,500; which is three times the density of the first example of the Victorian terrace.

That is all I really wanted to cover in terms of introduction. I will leave the slides there so we can go back to them if any of the guests want to refer to them; but that just sets the scene for how we are going to be looking at managing London's housing density in the future.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Thank you very much for that. I am going to ask a couple of questions to set the scene and get us going. One is in terms of sections of density and the other is about how we measure it.

What Paul was talking about is that people often equate high-rise with high density, or high density with high-rise. There are fears that London, if we carry on, will become Manhattanised, so to speak. I would just like to say are these fears justified or are there ways that we can overcome them. It would be good to get some reflections and then we will go on to talk about measuring density after that.

High-rise and high density, are these fears justified? Who would like to go first?

Andy von Bradsky (Chairman, PRP Architects and Chair of the RIBA Housing Group): I do not mind kicking it off.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Kick off.

Andy von Bradsky (Chairman, PRP Architects and Chair of the RIBA Housing Group): I think we are seeing far more higher buildings in London than we have done in previous years. There is no question about

that. Mostly the higher rise buildings that we are seeing being commissioned for ourselves are on well-connected groups, where the Public Transport Accessibility Level (PTAL) rating is four to six obviously, and there are good justifications for doing so. High density does not necessarily mean high-rise, as your paper suggests. We are also designing some schemes which are between six and eight story; and are achieving very high densities and accommodating appropriate family accommodation with ground floor maisonettes with open space and good size balconies. All complying with the London Housing Design Guide, which I think in a sense has set a good precedent.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Can you give an example of that? It is good if you would pepper what you say with giving examples.

Andy von Bradsky (Chairman, PRP Architects and Chair of the RIBA Housing Group): Indeed. We have a scheme in Kensington Chelsea called Portobello Square; which I think is well worth looking at in terms of an example of how you can develop a very close-knit, high density mix, tenure neutral accommodation with front doors onto streets.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): What does 'tenure neutral' mean?

Andy von Bradsky (Chairman, PRP Architects and Chair of the RIBA Housing Group): It means that as you walk down the street you cannot tell which tenure any particular property is associated with.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): You mean different: rented, not for sale and so on.

Andy von Bradsky (Chairman, PRP Architects and Chair of the RIBA Housing Group): Social, intermediate and for sale cannot be readily distinguished. Different cores have different tenures but the facades are the same and the design from an external street perspective does not differ. I think that is by far the most appropriate way of dealing with mixed tenure.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): What density is that one?

Andy von Bradsky (Chairman, PRP Architects and Chair of the RIBA Housing Group): We are up to about 220 dwellings per hectare on that particular site.

In contrast to that we have a scheme of what I would call more than super dense, in Lewisham Gateway, which achieves something like 500, which is double that; but it is right on top of a transport hub with all the connections necessary to justify that particular high density. It does not include family accommodation and it is mainly for either private rent or for smaller accommodation for private sale.

Navin Shah AM: Chair, is that in the main one and two-bedroom units?

Andy von Bradsky (Chairman, PRP Architects and Chair of the RIBA Housing Group): Yes, mainly one and two bedroom. There are some three, but a very small proportion of three-bedroom units.

Navin Shah AM: Those three-bedroom units, in your view, do they have adequate amenities in terms of welcoming spaces? Is there less communal area to reflect that proportion with the other scheme?

Andy von Bradsky (Chairman, PRP Architects and Chair of the RIBA Housing Group): It complies with the London Housing Design Guide in terms of balcony area, but interestingly it has a public open space; and this is a clear argument about where high density is appropriate in terms of connectivity but perhaps not in terms of public open space. I think the high-rise developments are particularly appropriate where you have

good access to facilities, amenities and good open space. That is perhaps a shortfall in the Lewisham context as there is not as much open space as there might be.

Navin Shah AM: If I can just interrupt. Chair, this is something we might want to hear from all the expert panel members here. What is your definition of high-rise?

Andy von Bradsky (Chairman, PRP Architects and Chair of the RIBA Housing Group): High-rise would be above eight stories and very tall buildings obviously can go up to 30 stories. I am sure the GLA will add to that.

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): Answering the same question, if you look at what data there is which is not great, on at what point the public start disliking buildings more, it is typically eight or ten stories. There are local surveys which have a view that people regard eight or ten stories as a high-rise and typically something they do not want.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Eight or ten stories?

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): Eight or ten stories are the data point I have seen in terms of what the public, when polled on particular developments, say they do not want/regard as high-rise. There is no specific definition, you can define it --

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Just a perception, OK.

Navin Shah AM: Can I also ask, do those perceptions vary between, say, inner London or City area to suburban areas? I represent Brent and Harrow and in Harrow, which is quite substantially green in terms of the green belt etc, certainly there is huge amount of resistance about anything which will be like even six to eight stories

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): I am not aware of, if you like, scientifically or polling terms robust, comparative data in different parts of London or different parts of the country. Maybe it is there and I do not know it.

Colin Wilson (Senior Manager, Planning Decisions, GLA): Yes, in the past we have commissioned polls about tall buildings. In fact when Nicky [Gavron] was Deputy Mayor we did one. The usual outcome is we ask people do they like a tall building. Half of them do and half of them do not.

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): Are you aware of data which is specific in different parts of London, because that is what I was asking. Data at a national level is off the scale, clear. Depending which data point you take and how you ask the question, between 77% and 89% or 96% of people typically do not like it. What I am not aware of, and there may be data that tells you, is what people in Ealing think, versus Chelsea, which I think is your question.

Colin Wilson (Senior Manager, Planning Decisions, GLA): Yes, I think inevitably it depends on context. It depends on the location, the locale, what people are losing, what people are gaining. I think if you tried to apply science to it, it would be a very dodgy science.

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): Why?

Colin Wilson (Senior Manager, Planning Decisions, GLA): Because of the particular circumstances of individual cases. You can, and I have met and quite recently met, residents in Canada Water who live on an

estate which has high-rises; and their view as a residents group is that they would support additional high-rise, if that could lever any improvements to their estate and their residents. You have to, I think, take into account the wider issues rather than just ask, “Aesthetically, do you like tall buildings, yes or no?”

Steve O’Connell AM (Deputy Chair): It depends. It is a good point. I take a local district centre of mine, which is an entry point to my borough. There is a proposed development that residents – this is part anecdotal, really not scientific – would probably be relaxed about ten stories, because it is a gateway site, it helps facilitation a bit. Nowhere else around that area is there anything of that height and indeed nowhere around the area would it probably be welcomed. However, because of the specifics of the gateway site on two Transport for London (TfL) arterial roads, through some soft canvassing and some research around it, it seems they are saying, “No. If it is properly designed, it is a gateway site and we wouldn’t be too unhappy if it was, say, ten stories and it will stand out”.

I think the point is and I am no proponent of high-rise, per se, there are places, and it depends.

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): I believe that one of the well-known polling companies has very recently commissioned some data at the London level which will be published shortly. My understanding is, and this is what I have heard anecdotally, that it says that at a London level, but not at a more specific level, people think the same as in the country, ie they tend to be opposed to large high-rise.

On the technicalities of your question, Chair, I tend to agree that high-rise and identity do not need to be the same thing. The issue, which we will come back to, is that there are many other things that make it hard to achieve high density in a non-high-rise or very medium high-rise formulation. That I think is getting to the crux of the issue. I should perhaps let others come in.

Colin Wilson (Senior Manager, Planning Decisions, GLA): I think in terms of high density or high-rise, it absolutely does not. South Kilburn Estate in Brent and Stonebridge Park Estates have some blocks in high density, high-rise; and both estates if you ran the London Housing Supplementary Planning Guidance (HSPG) test against them would meet the criteria for sizes of flats, units per core open space and the density matrix. The reason they did not work is because they were very poorly designed, very poorly managed. As the policy says, it is not just a mechanical thing, there are lots of things that go into those considerations and their replacements when they are taking them down at South Kilburn and at Stonebridge, are a mix of houses and flats which are working very well but at a higher density.

Again, I am not saying you have to have high-rise, I am just saying that in some contexts it can be appropriate and you can achieve as high or higher densities with low-rise as you can with high-rises; as is shown in lots of estate redevelopments.

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): That is very fair. One of the things to say about high-rises as they have been in the last couple of decades is that, a lot of it was governed by policies in the 1960s and the 1970s; and that if you went above 200 habitable rooms to the acre you had to go to an audit committee, to effectively check the health and safety of the scheme. They would always check that there were counterbalancing amenities, like green space. You would get your two towers and then you would get a load of green space around them which then snapped the density right back down because they were actually compensating for that. They knew they had to do that.

I think the question originally was: are we going to see more towers as a result of the chase for density. There are people who have been watching this, but I think most towers in London are defined really by the standards around the lift provision. Lifts cost a fortune. If you think about a lift it might cost £2 million, so what you will end up with is a scheme which will work to the standard at which it is allowed to build to; and you will get lots

and lots of towers at a particular height. Then you will get schemes that are allowed to be built to the next height, which is two lifts, which I think is 22 stories.

If you look at the history of London between say 1970 and 2005 there are only about five towers that went above that British Standard for two lifts, because it was so expensive to do it; so you had the Dryden Tower and the Shakespeare Tower and Barbican and you had a couple of World's End down in the Kings Road and very few others.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Just one lift goes to what height?

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): It is 11.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Two lifts go to 22.

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): To 22, and then beyond that three. That is the same, not just here but, across Europe. If you go to Moscow everything in Moscow is at the maximum height that you are allowed with the minimum number of lifts. It is the defining nature of the way development is done.

Taking that point, 22 stories, look around London and you can find up to five towers between 1970 and 2005 and you can wind the clock back to something like 2003 and look at submissions that were coming into Southwark. There was one called Empire Square, which is now called, I think, Tabernacle Square and that was a Berkley Homes development around the back of London Bridge. They wanted to put in a 32-storey tower. It was taken down to 25, I think, and that was one of the highest residential towers at the time.

Now in Southwark, around Blackfriars Bridge, there are five towers of more than 40 floors within 150 metres of each other. That is the big significant change. When you say to people, "Where is a gateway post and how high do you want to build and what is the value you can generate?" now suddenly you are seeing something you just never saw before.

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): The two things that have changed are the massively high land values, which have flipped the economics. So once the cost of buying land forms a high proportion of the total cost things make sense economically that just do not at lower land values. Also there is a correct perception that the planning system is going to permit more towers, which obviously forces up the land value in a devil's game of higher and higher costs.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Wait a minute - just spell that out, why we have those five towers at Blackfriars?

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): The higher the cost of the land as a proportion of the total-build cost the easier it is to justify economically building higher. If the land is free it never makes sense to build a tower block, because per square foot it costs far more; and you obviously you have more health and safety, the cost of capital is high because you cannot stop until you stop. Health and safety requirements, there are fewer companies that can do it. Everything about the process is more financially difficult to finance. Harder build, more costly, more risky. However, once land values go beyond a certain point the economics tilt, so the key reason that it is so much easier to build tower blocks now in London is because the land value is going so absurdly high.

The second reason, not entirely disassociated is that planning permission is easier to obtain and that allows land values to be higher; if you think you are going to get a higher amount of square footage and that justifies it and that requires it and on and on you go.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Yes. Can I just ask, Andy, you say you are disagreeing? Are you agreeing or disagreeing with what (overspeaking)

Will McKee CBE (Chair, Tilfen Land and the Outer London Commission): I was going to give you an example actually, because I think everything that has been said is true in some parts of London; and completely untrue in other parts of London. Even within the suburbs it is true and untrue in different parts, as Councillor Shah said.

I will give you an example, because I do not think developers work like that at all. My company looks at two things to start off. It looks at sales values and it looks at build values. What ends up at the bottom of that is how much we are prepared to pay for the land. It does not start with how much we are prepared to pay for the land and what can we get on it. It starts off with can we sell what we think we are going to do.

In a lot of outer London, and particularly for example let us say in parts of Greenwich and parts of Bexley and around there, sales values are still so low that you cannot afford to build at high density; because of the infrastructure costs, the lifts and the rest of it. They actually add up to a sales price which the market in that part of London will not bear, so you are driven by sales values at the end of the day. The reason why, if Tony Pedgley [Chairman of the Berkeley Group plc] was here and he is telling you why he can build higher density down at Marine Wharf, it is because the sales values at Marine Wharf are so high that he can actually buy the land and build the apartments and still sell them into a market place. I think it is crucially about that sales volume, sale and construction cost equation. It is not about land value.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Partly also to do with location, isn't it?

Will McKee CBE (Chair, Tilfen Land and the Outer London Commission): Yes, of course it is.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): By allowing very high densities very close to public transport because then you have --

Will McKee CBE (Chair, Tilfen Land and the Outer London Commission): At the risk of being too controversial, if you toss in the issue of tenure to that equation, which has a big impact on sales values, then I think you begin to get some feel for how developers approach it.

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): They are a function of the same thing. We can sell more because the land is worth more and people need the homes more. I do not disagree with your example, but I do not think we are making a different point. If values are high enough you can justify high-rise, if they are not you cannot.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Yes. It is also about where it is and whether you have views and whether you will get millions for the top flats and so on. Just in those five towers, just remind us, are they all residential?

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): Yes.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): What do we have in them, one, two-bed?

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): Mostly ones.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Any families?

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): No, I do not think so.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Any social rented?

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): It is all offsite.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): All offsite, you say.

Colin Wilson (Senior Manager, Planning Decisions, GLA): It is all commuter service.

Colin Wilson (Senior Manager, Planning Decisions, GLA): No, I think some of it is onsite.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Colin, you wanted to come in?

Colin Wilson (Senior Manager, Planning Decisions, GLA): Yes, on complex towers there is some offsite provision. Predominantly they are twos and ones. In some of them there are some larger units and there is onsite provision.

Male Speaker: Is that the Coin Street one?

Colin Wilson (Senior Manager, Planning Decisions, GLA): No, I think (over-speaking) is a tower and very dense and part of the negotiation then is to have affordable housing onsite and Peabody are doing very well with density level. I cannot remember entirely but most of them in negotiation with Southwark are not looking to necessarily offsite the whole offer, so some of it will be onsite.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Andy, do you want to come in?

Andy von Bradsky (Chairman, PRP Architects and Chair of the RIBA Housing Group): Yes. Can I pick up on what Will said about appropriate location and reference back to Berkeley Homes? They have developed the Ferrier Estate, now known as Kidbrooke, and invested heavily in infrastructure upfront, which created a rich mix of different offers for different parts of the market. It is not central London, it is not urban, it is on the periphery. Yet by doing that they have created almost a context where developing a very tall building seems appropriate, because you have the open space, you have the investment in infrastructure, you have the facilities and you have the connectivity. I think there are other factors that need to be brought into play about early investment in infrastructure.

Will McKee CBE (Chair, Tilfen Land and the Outer London Commission): I think that is absolutely right and the Kidbrooke scheme is interesting because the Kidbrooke scheme actually was not a profitable scheme in its early stages; because of that high upfront infrastructure cost. You can only do that if you have a big enough site, if you have a site that can be phased through the -- I keep saying to people looking at developments, you have to look at the cash flow of developments as well as the bottom line. It is that up front initial cost that has to be coped with before you start selling or letting houses down the line. Pedgley [Chairman of the Berkeley Group plc] was able to get past that because he was able to phase that development to the point where, down the line they were able to turn that into an ultimately profitable making. Size matters, phasing matters and cash flow matters. It is a very much more complex theme than just, and Chairman, I heard that the last time I met, developers pushing up land values. It is a lot more complicated than that.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Anyone else want to come in on this point?

Richard Lavington (Maccreevor Lavington Architects): I think the other thing worth thinking about with towers is you need the market that is correct at the right time. You need to be able to sell the apartments while you are building it, or before you build it, because you want it to be occupied as soon as it is ready for occupation; so you have to have a market where that is possible.

Will McKee CBE (Chair, Tilfen Land and the Outer London Commission): Can I just make one very quick point about this diversity need to policies which can reflect different circumstances? I was just thinking about what Councillor Shah said. There are large swathes of outer London where three stories are regarded as high-rise, because that is the opinion. You might think that is a parody and stupid but that is actually what the perception is out there. They would not have the same perception about high density. High density does not imply high-rise and there are plenty of examples, the Commission identified them, where you can get acceptable high densities without running into the resistance to high-rise. I am talking about suburban areas now - I am not talking about inner and central London.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): How do you **avoid** this perception that three stories is high-rise?

Will McKee CBE (Chair, Tilfen Land and the Outer London Commission): I was parodying it slightly but I can certainly --

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): OK.

Navin Shah AM: I would very much concur with that comment, because this is what unfortunately the planners, local representatives face day in, day out. This is where when you have large opportunity areas, for example, designated, and when you start talking about high density the myth is very much that is going to mean tower blocks; a Manhattan-in-Harrow kind of scenario. This is what we have to grapple with and solve - that mystery that high density is not automatically high-rise blocks. It is a question of how you can put that into your planning fabric, so to say, planning policies, whether at local level in your area action plan or through the London Plan.

How do you educate the local community? I can tell you that having got a large increase in proportion of targeted housing projected over a number of years, you are looking at quite a substantial number of additional units wherever you live; and the big challenge is going to be endorsing some areas where two or three stories are big enough, forget about the six or eight stories scenario. I think that is where this session is very important for us, to have that feedback and that discussion.

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): I think that goes to the heart of it. I think we have agreed, not literally, but I think we are all agreed that high-rise does not have to equate to high density. We all have slightly different takes on that but that is spatially correct. I think we would all agree and you certainly make a very eloquent point that the public perception is not at that point. I would argue that the risk is that because of some of the stuff that is getting built and some of the ways in which it is getting in built, some of the processes in which it is getting built have high degrees of controversy. I am going to put this as uncontroversially as I can, but I think we can all agree looking at, say, the Heygate regeneration and Earls Court that the process has not been perfect for all involved. I think that is a non-contentious way of putting it. I do not want to get into a discussion but all I am saying is the process has been painful. I think that is a non-controversial statement.

If we can move to a point where it becomes far more profound, the ways in which we can include the public in what gets built, so that; neighbourhood planning gets much stronger, there are much far greater local controls on what gets built and what does not get built, people come into the process far, far more than is currently happening. If we can do that, if we can strip away the rules that make it, I will not say 'impossible' because

there are ways around it when you talk to planning consultants but make, it incredibly hard to match, certainly in an urban context, the high density terraces of houses or vertical access flats that are, if you look at their value, the most popular forms of housing in London. If we could make it easier for some of the good gentlemen here and others not in the room to build things that are typologically more like Pimlico or bits of high density inner London, Pimlico is about 175 units per hectare, give or take. It would be very hard to build Pimlico now. You would have to argue your way through a whole bunch of plans that would essentially stop you. We need to start developing a scale in that way. I am not saying it has to look like Pimlico. It can look modern and interesting, as long as the local people support it. If we can get to that perception of high density then I think you can unpick the challenge that, if you like, has gone through all the answers to your question.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Just how many stories do you think is Pimlico?

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): It is five or six in most places.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Terrace, because you have basements, you have attic rooms.

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): Basements are almost impossible to build now.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): OK, so you have five stories. Attic rooms, attics in the roof I mean. OK, all right.

I would like us to move on now to just measuring density, because it is so --

Colin Wilson (Senior Manager, Planning Decisions, GLA): Just coming out on the point briefly. Kidbrooke is --

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Because you are on a dead bit, can you just shout.

Colin Wilson (Senior Manager, Planning Decisions, GLA): Yes, sorry. I will get closer to the microphone. Kidbrooke was mentioned and Kidbrooke is an example of mixed redevelopments with terraced houses with front and back gardens but also blocks of flats, not dissimilar to the kind of mansion block typology. In some respects not dissimilar to a Maida Vale type of approach, where you have a mix of types, mix of tenure, open space provided. It has all been talked about as part of the infrastructure.

I do not see that there are a set of rules, either within the London Plan or the HSPG that preclude that kind of development, or that insist everything should be flatted or should be high-rise. They do allow flexibility for context and appropriateness. That is as to the wider context, not just the physical context but the social context, the context in which you are trying to regenerate areas often with really quite severe problems, like South Kilburn. I do not see that anything we have at the moment, in terms of our guidance, is setting out a set of rules which preclude the kind of developments that you are promoting; because I think some of that is being delivered and delivered really well by housing developers at the moment.

Going to the point about is it different in different parts of London, well of course it is. Suburban London is different from Southwark. I think Southwark and Lambeth have long been perceived as south of the river, not really in central London. As the diagram showed earlier, as London's population moves upwards from 8 million to 9 million then Southwark and Lambeth, and the leaders of both of those councils are promoting this, are playing a role as part of the heart of London. Of course I think there will be high-rise buildings and a higher density in those locations. That is related to value.

In some parts of outer London people are taking down high-rise buildings, the Goresbrook Estate is an example, Kidbrooke is another example actually, where they have been replaced by lower densities and

traditional housing types, because it makes more sense in those locations and people have made mistakes in the past.

I do not think the HSPG precludes terraced housing (over-speaking)

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): It insists on having doors to the street which drives as a form the type that we are hearing about. If you go to look at some of the schemes that Colin was referencing there, is huge numbers of doors to the street in order to avoid all the issues that come from sharing common paths.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): There are a huge number of doors?

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): To the street, to avoid all the issues that come with sharing common paths, like lifts and corridors.

Colin Wilson (Senior Manager, Planning Decisions, GLA): Actually the South Kilburn Estate, built in 1973, currently being demolished, had low-rise six-storey elements around a central square. No front doors onto that square. Everything was accessed off the first floor balcony. Completely ridiculous design, imported from Sweden, so not everything Swedish is great in terms of (over-speaking)

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): Which one is that one?

Colin Wilson (Senior Manager, Planning Decisions, GLA): South Kilburn Estate, the system build. It is being replaced by five six-storey blocks which have front doors onto Kilburn Park Road and that makes a tremendous difference. They do not look like the Victorian buildings on the other side, in terms of detail, but they function in a very similar way to the Victorian terraces on the other side. I think that is one of the very, very positive outcomes of the Housing Design Guide and the HSPG.

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): Very similar in form to the existing Edwardian terrace on the other side. If you were to look at it through some kind of a filter you would not be able to tell which was from the 19th century and which was from the 21st.

Richard Lavington (Maccreanor Lavington Architects): Its location makes a difference. If you are looking at these estate regeneration schemes it is starting to work very well in places like South Kilburn or in Westminster or in bits of North Southwark. If you get the right estate where there is enough open space, you can afford to demolish everything that already exists and you do not have to multiply the density by too much to be able to finance the whole redevelopment; and potentially offer all the existing leaseholders and tenants an offer that will make it more acceptable. That is one of the things that is so controversial about the Heygate, people do not benefit in any way. Actually some offer that makes it of benefit, in those inner London locations that is possible, but if you look at places in outer London like --

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): In inner London it is possible?

Richard Lavington (Maccreanor Lavington Architects): It is possible to make those work just because the values are so high.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Give us an example of where it is working, where you have not got a Heygate?

Richard Lavington (Maccreanor Lavington Architects): Things like South Kilburn it is working. In Heygate the quality of the spaces created and the quality of the architecture created will be good. There are

issues with the process and the exercise to get through that. If you get to estates in outer London, like in Barking, it is much more difficult to make it work. It is very difficult to create the increases in density that will make it financeable and deliver all the quality because you do not get the same profit as --

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): I am not sure about that. I literally just finished running the economics on proposed, I cannot say where because it is still commercially sensitive, regeneration in the far southwest of London; and they have done absolutely good work, so I think it can be done in outer London.

Richard Lavington (Maccreanor Lavington Architects): It depends on the existing density of the estate.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): I want to cut us off at this point because there are lots of other questions where some of these points can be brought back in. I want to just talk about measuring density. The way it is measured now: who mentioned the Lewisham --

Andy von Bradsky (Chairman, PRP Architects and Chair of the RIBA Housing Group): Yes I did.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): You said that was 500 dwellings per hectare, did you?

Andy von Bradsky (Chairman, PRP Architects and Chair of the RIBA Housing Group): Yes.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Right. Just to illuminate us, where is that on the density matrix?

Andy von Bradsky (Chairman, PRP Architects and Chair of the RIBA Housing Group): That is slightly off the scale.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Slightly off the scale. What should it be?

Andy von Bradsky (Chairman, PRP Architects and Chair of the RIBA Housing Group): No, it is entirely appropriate. This is part of --

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): What would the matrix say?

Andy von Bradsky (Chairman, PRP Architects and Chair of the RIBA Housing Group): The matrix I think is 450, is it? The top band is 405. It is right on a transport hub and it is highly appropriate in terms of the open form, ie, towers marking gateways at that point. It is very well connected with good amenities and facilities nearby, so I think the justification for it is entirely arguable.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): All of us want to look now at the measurement of density. This is dwellings. This is the number of units on a site. How many habitable rooms then on this Lewisham gateway site?

Andy von Bradsky (Chairman, PRP Architects and Chair of the RIBA Housing Group): This is one of the difficulties with measures. When you talk about dwellings per hectare it predicates developers to build smaller units in multiple amounts. I think a better measure would be perhaps the room count or even the floor area in mixed use schemes. That is a much better --

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): That is exactly the way (overspeaking)

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Wait a minute - just go through the habitable rooms. Do you know what they would be on the Gateway site?

Andy von Bradsky (Chairman, PRP Architects and Chair of the RIBA Housing Group): I don't actually. I cannot recall the exact figure, but it is misleading because they comply with all the standards but they are one and two-bedroom flats predominantly. It implies that this is a higher density development than it actually is, in the sense that if you measure the floor area or the number of habitable rooms the proportion comes down relative to more intense family accommodation.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): It comes down because you have what?

Andy von Bradsky (Chairman, PRP Architects and Chair of the RIBA Housing Group): Because your average habitable room for that site is lower.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): The numbers of habitable rooms are lower?

Andy von Bradsky (Chairman, PRP Architects and Chair of the RIBA Housing Group): Yes. The average habitable room count is lower.

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): It is very strange that the whole of the development industry looks at every site in terms of the number of square feet or square metres of saleable space. The currency of that site is always measured by that. Everybody, the surveyors, the banks, the building society, anyone that is (overspeaking) knows that site for the volume of square feet or square metres (overspeaking)

Will McKee CBE (Chair, Tilfen Land and the Outer London Commission): The occupiers as well.

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): The occupiers even. Yet the planning system always approaches you on the number of habitable rooms or dwellings. There is a disconnect which some other cities do not do. They actually do their spatial planning on the basis of the number of square metres or according to particular streets and they set a volumetric size for streets. It is very helpful because then it stops people buying sites and saying, "Right we've got planning permission for 50 per hectare here, we've been told now by the London Plan we should raise it, let's go back into planning with change in design and see if we can get 100". They go in and they get 100, someone else buys the sites off them and says, "Let's go back into planning now because the policy is loosening up and see if we can get 150" and it keeps going.

If people understood that a street would be built out at a number of square feet, or a square metre per acre or hectare, whichever you prefer, you get a lot closer to certainty; and you go a lot closer to the actual industry that you are trying to measure.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): What do you think of that, Colin?

Colin Wilson (Senior Manager, Planning Decisions, GLA): Yes, it is an interesting point.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Other countries do it like that.

Colin Wilson (Senior Manager, Planning Decisions, GLA): Yes. I think to me the key thing is to not obsess too much about density matrix; because as the current version of the London Plan points out, it is something that has to be considered with other relevant planning objectives around design, around social infrastructure, around open space. It is intended to be a guide, to consider amongst other things, and an awful lot of time can be spent fretting about quite what its structure is. I think if it is part of the consideration, which it was always intended to be, part of looking at something in the round, in itself, is it is never going to give you the right answer. Talk about South Kilburn Estate, it ticks a box for a density matrix, it could even

tick a box for where it is this many square feet, but a complete disaster as a place to live. I think it is wrong always to obsess about one aspect of the London Plan and are we implementing that aspect. I think it has to be seen in the round with other considerations, which are quite right, like we touched on about high-rise in that context.

Navin Shah AM: Just a point. Should density matrix also include the type of dwellings, because you know we are talking about appropriate units for the locality, for the community that it is serving; therefore, should you not, be saying, fine you have that square metre-age10:57:58 to reflect the local character of the area? At the same time should we not be saying that actually the local area requires X proportion of these sizes and types of dwellings; and therefore that is an important aspect of the matrix itself? It is something which is ignored or does not quite come about.

Colin Wilson (Senior Manager, Planning Decisions, GLA): Well if I can go to that point that is part of the consideration of the relevant planning objectives. Some very important relevant planning objectives other than the plan are the mix of types of units.

Navin Shah AM: Unfortunately it is not delivered. We are being a number of times that it is not viable for financial reasons X, Y, Z or we will have it offsite and so on.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Navin, it is really important this question, what you are talking about, but I just want us to stick for the moment to just how we measure density then we can get on to the type.

Navin Shah AM: No, but in terms of the matrix we are talking about, this could be an interesting complement to it. That is where I am coming from.

Colin Wilson (Senior Manager, Planning Decisions, GLA): To illustrate that with an example, the Lots Road Call In Inquiry, the GLA and Hammersmith and Fulham supported that planning application which was for a mixture of low-rise; and the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea opposed it because the site was split over two borough boundaries. We got to the inquiry and Hammersmith and Fulham and ourselves had one way of measuring density, the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea had another way of measuring density and the applicants had a third way of measuring density. The inspector concluded that it was not the mathematics that was actually important. The fact that there were three ways of measuring the density, which vary between 450, 480 and 490 rooms per hectare, that was different ways of establishing how you were measuring the density. However the important thing was the quality of place that you were creating. Had the architect made the case and indeed was the mix right in terms of the affordable housing and where that was provided on the site and the open spaces; and therefore, he felt the scheme was acceptable. To a degree it did not matter that there was some variation on the mathematics, in the way you calculate density.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): I really want to come in here and say that from my experience of looking at plans and layouts and so on, we talk about are a lot of two-beds going to be for families. They are not always. There is one double room and maybe one little room you could put your single bed in. You have a family house, so called, three-bed and in terms of bed spaces you would be lucky to get four in. We are so imprecise in terms of what we are saying. Would 'bed spaces' be maybe a better name?

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): I think it would be, but on that point you are making about three or four bedrooms, you can see a house advertised in Barking at the moment, or the Barking Riverside Scheme, which is a four-bedroom house; which is 99 square metres, next to a four-bedroom house which is 140 square metres. The surveyors are valuing them both at the same price because they are both four-bedroom houses. This business about square metres rather than bed spaces, I think, is fundamental and needs to be brought much further to the front.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Does anyone else have a point to make?

Will McKee CBE (Chair, Tilfen Land and the Outer London Commission): Just a couple of points, Chair. It is very interesting that if you look at the selling brochures of all these schemes, the sale brochures are expressed in square metres. If you look at Marine Wharf, I just happened to have been there yesterday, which is why I remember it, yes they have the number of rooms but the actual division is between a 750 square foot flat, or an 850 or so on. I agree with this point about floor space and it is certainly what occupiers are looking for.

Can I just add something to slightly broaden it? We are talking about whether to measure habitable rooms, or dwelling, but it is first year, first lesson planning school stuff. The Outer London Commission made a point, which is that you also have to look at the area to which that particular indicator is applied and what is a net residential area; and what, for that matter, is a gross residential area. The Outer London Commission made one particular point, which I will just put on the table and they said, "If you are expecting as a matter of good planning for a developer to provide publically accessible open space as part of the scheme, then that should be included in the net residential area, because if you leave it out you are compressing the developable part to a point where the figures begin to look silly".

Andy von Bradsky (Chairman, PRP Architects and Chair of the RIBA Housing Group): Ancillary open spaces rather than large open space.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Just explain to us then what is included? We all assume open space is included in it.

Will McKee CBE (Chair, Tilfen Land and the Outer London Commission): If you are a planning authority and a developer wants to come and put up X number of units and you say to him, "Also I want you to provide a piece of public open space" adjacent to the development, within the development, a courtyard on the side of it, whatever it is, but it is part of the development. It is not the Lewisham example where there is something that was provided 100 years ago just down the road. Then the density calculation, whether you think it is too high or too low, whether it is habitable rooms or anything else, should be applied to the whole area including the open space; because otherwise you are penalising the developer by compressing it down onto what amounts to the net built area. It is an important point.

Andy von Bradsky (Chairman, PRP Architects and Chair of the RIBA Housing Group): Can I say I entirely agree with that. Our experience of calculating densities varies from site to site because you either have, or you do not, have open space within it; and you are redlining outside of the open space. It becomes particularly relevant when the open space that might be nearby is not in the ownership of the applicant. I think there is a sort of proportionate issue in how dense a development is. It is dependent very largely on the context.

Will McKee CBE (Chair, Tilfen Land and the Outer London Commission): To put it really simply there are two elements to density. It is the unit you are choosing to measure and the area you are choosing to apply it to. Those are the two key determinates.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): We are all in agreement, are we that the amenity space needs to be part of the whole measurement of density? Are we in agreement about bed space being --

Colin Wilson (Senior Manager, Planning Decisions, GLA): Well, Nicky, the example I gave of Lots Road was where there is a disagreement about which open space you could count as measuring your density. The

developer is maintaining that the Lots Road Creek which goes through the site counted because it was an amenity; however the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea said that it did not count because it was not an amenity. It looked like an amenity to me. Then there is a debate about how much of the river do you count, because it has a River Thames frontage in your calculation.

Will McKee CBE (Chair, Tilfen Land and the Outer London Commission): It is very special, a riverside site.

Colin Wilson (Senior Manager, Planning Decisions, GLA): Even on non-riverside sites you can get into a very lengthy debate about what counts as the (overspeaking)

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Do you want a parting shot, because you have to go?

Andy von Bradsky (Chairman, PRP Architects and Chair of the RIBA Housing Group): Sorry, I do apologise. There are just two points, and I apologise for having to peel away. One point is viability and returning to that point about viability pushing densities in inappropriate areas and I think that has to be acknowledged. If there was an amount of development required to pay for all the section 106 requirements without the appropriate amount of investment then that, from our experience, can push densities. There is an example in the London Plan where a figure is given but we actually know that the development has to be twice that density to pay for all of the infrastructure and, the associated section 106 requirement for social housing. That is one point.

The other point I just wanted to leave was that the Super Density Report, which was written back in 2007 is becoming almost more relevant now and it is worth a re-read. One of the key issues on the Super Density Report was the relationship with management and the importance of management regimes from high density schemes and all high density schemes above 150 dwellings per hectare should have a management plan as a statutory requirement for submission at planning stage, and service charges perhaps being capitalised from the cost of the land to help pay for service charges.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Service charges need to be?

Andy von Bradsky (Chairman, PRP Architects and Chair of the RIBA Housing Group): The cost of service charges into the future needs to be reflected in the land value. I still take the point.

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): Take them as a build cost and look at it from there.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): That is interesting.

Andy von Bradsky (Chairman, PRP Architects and Chair of the RIBA Housing Group): They are left-field suggestions but --

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): They are interesting. What would you suggest? If you were asked, what would you suggest to the Mayor in terms of the density matrix and how you measure it?

Andy von Bradsky (Chairman, PRP Architects and Chair of the RIBA Housing Group): Either bed spaces or square metres depending on the type of development because mixed-use developments can be quite complicated in terms of how you calculate density.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): If it is residential only?

Andy von Bradsky (Chairman, PRP Architects and Chair of the RIBA Housing Group): If it is residential only, bedroom spaces.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Bedroom spaces, OK. Thank you, Andy.

Andy von Bradsky (Chairman, PRP Architects and Chair of the RIBA Housing Group): Thank you very much.

Will McKee CBE (Chair, Tilfen Land and the Outer London Commission): Can I just pick up on this point? It is such an interesting one, the point about high-rise and management and high-rise and tenure.

When I was at Merton, we had an ex-Greater London Council (GLC) estate which had won architectural awards when it was built, but had reached a point where actually nobody and certainly no council tenant wanted to live there. The reason was that the management of the high-rise was so poor. People with four children were stuck on the twelfth floor. The lifts did not work. They were mugged as soon as they stepped down into the foyer. This is real stuff, not just made up. We were about to pull it down when we thought, "If people live in 12-storey flats in Kensington and actually want to, why do they not want to in Mitcham?" As an experiment, we ran these council flats as if they were administered in the private sector in Kensington. We put in a concierge, we put in security doors, we put the lifts on to a two-hour maintenance programme so they were never out of action for too long and we took everybody with four kids off the twelfth floor and put them into family housing somewhere else. In other words, we managed the flats in a way that the kind of people who were appropriate in flats would live there. Within a year, we had a waiting list to go there.

That is just underlining the point about management of high-rise as part of the equation of making them acceptable places for (over-speaking)

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): That is absolutely right. The problem of course as you will appreciate, is that, that costs a lot more money. Depending upon which data point you choose and whom you cite, I have heard numbers in the range of between 50% and 100% more. In a way, yes, it can work, but why start with a typology that makes it much more expensive to make it work?

The data is also very clear that big, complex multi-storey and high-rise tends to be correlated with bad social outcomes for people who live there, particularly when there is a high proportion of families, or people in social housing. We must not, I would argue, go back to putting them in that. We may be able to put in a better management system right now, but we cannot control and we cannot predict what the management system will like in five years or ten years. We do not know what cash flows for local government will be. We do not know what will get squeezed. There must be a risk for us in trying to recreate that type of typology, particularly for social housing. We are just creating problems for the future.

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): We are not going to recreate the same lettings policies and the same management mistakes. It is very reasonable to comment on the mistakes of the past in terms of what we have learned, but we would not then go out and do exactly the same thing again.

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): That is interesting that --

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): This point about the service charges being costed in, is quite important, is it not?

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): There is recent data from a Cambridge University study which is that bigger, more complex buildings with statistical significance have higher service charges, so there is no way around that. You can hope you will not make mistakes but government, be it local or national, has

an infinite capacity to remake mistakes of the past. When you talk to some officials and policy experts, lots of the evidence from 20 years ago is not known. I hope you are right, but creating a physical typology that means if you get it wrong at any stage in the future things descend quite quickly, seems to me to be putting two hands behind your back.

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): Richard cannot talk about it because he designed part of it, but there is a scheme at Bromley-by-Bow that is essentially a development of nearly 500 homes to the hectare which has three large blocks of typically eight to ten storeys. Then it has a point block alongside it of about 28. Essentially, it does all the things we have been discussing, but from the point of view of knowing what works and what does not work now. You get very, very generous houses in these very dense urban forms for large families, double-stacked maisonettes for large families, smaller flats for intermediate and smaller family units, wheelchair-accessible housing on the top. Then you get about 28 storeys, typically for small apartments for market sale purchasers. The whole thing has a fantastic management regime and a very clever way of dealing with the outdoor space. I would say --

Will McKee CBE (Chair, Tilfen Land and the Outer London Commission): Is that St Andrews?

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): St Andrews in Bromley-by-Bow?

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): It deals with all the issues that we now know failed in the 1960s and 1970s and it essentially builds in ideas for counterbalancing them.

Richard Lavington (Maccreanor Lavington Architects): It will always require more management than terraced houses, but that is the price you pay because otherwise you would have to have that much more land to do it as terraced houses. This idea that high density does not need to mean high-rise is partly true, but no one is proposing to build high-rise at the moment with large amounts of open space at the ground-floor level. Actually, if you push the densities up, the heights of the buildings do go up. If you are talking about the difference between the way a 1960s estate was planned and the way traditional street properties were planned, no, high density does not mean high-rise; but now in the context of what we are doing in London, if you want to have high densities or super densities --

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): If you want highest densities or particular (overspeaking), yes.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Über density, maybe.

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): Über density, yes.

Richard Lavington (Maccreanor Lavington Architects): We will get that. We will get high-rise developments, whether you see that as eight-storeys - and actually in the suburbs eight storeys is a high-rise development - or in central London it will start to mean towers. If we are talking about the top end of Blackfriars Road there is not a low-rise solution to achieving anything like those densities, but those densities that close to central London are appropriate.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Just on St Andrews, how many storeys is the highest?

Richard Lavington (Maccreanor Lavington Architects): Generally, the perimeter blocks are seven with bits that rise to eight and twelve in one place, so those are the perimeter blocks. On the southern edge, they have three storeys. Then there is a 26-storey tower.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): A good range of different types of homes?

Richard Lavington (Maccreeanor Lavington Architects): Yes, a very high proportion of family homes, actually.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Do you accept the bed space argument? I am going to move away from mentioning density, but we are very concerned by this.

Richard Lavington (Maccreeanor Lavington Architects): There is not a great difference. Habitable rooms and bed spaces are partly measuring the same thing. They are not exactly the same, but they take into account the size of the place. The thing about bed space is it does not take into recognition occupation.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): No. We have had submissions on this. Another suggestion has been that we should actually measure child density because the issue is that the bedrooms are not big enough for two children.

Richard Lavington (Maccreeanor Lavington Architects): Actually, no. Now we have the London Housing Design Guide. If it is a two-person room, then there is a size that that room needs to have and that then is addressed. If you look back at older developments that might be true, but actually if we are looking at things that are being built now to the London Housing Design Guide, then they will be --

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Colin, can I just ask you? Do you look? When I used to look at these things, it did not tell you what the rooms were going to be. You had to look yourself at the layout and the plans, to see whether it was going to be a two-person bedroom that was a third bedroom, or in the second bedroom. It did not even tell you.

Colin Wilson (Senior Manager, Planning Decisions, GLA): One of the great benefits of having the HSPG taking on the Housing Design Guide is that you are looking at the density matrix but you are also looking at the overlay of the HSPG's recommendations for housing quality. Within detailed schemes, there will be detailed layouts of flats and developers will now confirm that they meet at least the minimum standards of the HSPG in terms of, amongst other things, sizes of rooms, including bedrooms.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): That does not come to you, does it?

Colin Wilson (Senior Manager, Planning Decisions, GLA): No, it does for referred cases. For non-referred cases, it goes to local authorities. Local authorities generally are asking for that information in detailed schemes as well. That level of detail will be on the table in a detailed application. In outline applications for larger schemes, what we will always ask for -and most of those schemes are referred to us - and what local authorities ask for as well is whether they can show us a typical layout of one of their blocks to prove that it can fit flat sizes/dwelling sizes that meet HSPG requirements.

That has shifted the quality of residential accommodation being delivered in London enormously, in a relatively short period of four or five years, certainly if you compare it to things that we saw in the early days of the GLA. I do not think it is just about the policy. It is as well about developers becoming a lot better and designers becoming a lot more experienced with high density design of dwellings; and a sharing of good ideas within London and within the wider southeast. The quality threshold has really changed out of all recognition.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Sure, but now most family-sized homes almost always - because we do not stipulate and we say, "Three-bed plus" - come in at three-bed and often they are not. We just know this from

what we get reported back. Often, the three-bedroom homes do not have enough beds for six people. That is a big issue.

Colin Wilson (Senior Manager, Planning Decisions, GLA): No, usually in the detailed applications they will identify how many bed spaces there are within the flat. They will say, "It is two-bedroom but it is three-person", or, "It is two-bedroom but it is four-person", so they will do that.

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): That is in the design guidance. That is already there.

Richard Lavington (Maccreanor Lavington Architects): Most three-bed units we do are more often for five. If they are in the private market they would often be for five, although the third bedroom might be designed big enough for a double bed, but not big enough to actually qualify as a double bedroom under the London Housing Design Guide.

Steve O'Connell AM (Deputy Chair): Chair, we bandied around this phrase of 'family-sized units' and it is quite a glib phrase but it is somewhat difficult to visualise what you really mean by a family-sized unit. We were discussing this at the pre-meet. What is a family? Is a family a couple? How does that work within the London Plan? Is there a definition - sorry, there obviously is - of what development will be expected on a family-sized unit? What does it mean?

Colin Wilson (Senior Manager, Planning Decisions, GLA): It is three-bed and over and usually what we see in applications is a mix of three and four-beds and some even larger units. Particularly in Tower Hamlets, for instance, we get schemes with five-bedroom units in them, so that is to meet --

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Would that be a ten-person?

Colin Wilson (Senior Manager, Planning Decisions, GLA): That is to meet a particular need. What the London Plan refers to are the requirements of the local authority and the context in which you are assessing where your housing need might be, for the affordable housing, certainly. That level of information is provided within applications. As well, you always have to bear in mind the limits of a planning system and of physical design. We cannot control how people occupy and live their lives. We cannot --

Will McKee CBE (Chair, Tilfen Land and the Outer London Commission): (over-speaking) be ambitious, can we?

Colin Wilson (Senior Manager, Planning Decisions, GLA): Sometimes I can sense people thinking, "Why can you not control every aspect of people's lives?"

Steve O'Connell AM (Deputy Chair): Will McKee made a point earlier about saying the kind of people appropriate to live there and he meant that in the nicest possible way; but who are the appropriate people to live on the twelfth storey? A large family would be inappropriate, but what is a family? Is it a couple and one baby? It is difficult. What is appropriate? What is a family? You cannot design all this out, can you? We might like to but I do not think actually --

Will McKee CBE (Chair, Tilfen Land and the Outer London Commission): Can I just make a plea for the Design Guide? I think it is a vital part. It does not remove the need for flexibility, but if you look at 1960s privately built housing outside of the top part and look at 1960s built public housing, the bigger spaces are in the public housing because they built to Parker Morris standards and the private sector did not. Now, with the new Design Guide, it is putting out a set of standards for everybody to follow. It does not solve everything, as

Colin said, but it is an absolutely crucial part of making sure you build spaces which are big enough to carry out the activities of a family or whatever inside. That is crucial.

Richard Lavington (Maccreanor Lavington Architects): It is critically important at the moment because the market is very much influenced by needs other than -- when you are talking about some of the high-rise development, the first purchasers may never have even seen the property when they choose to buy it. A lot of them are being marketed in the Far East, so it is very important that we have a standard that ensures we are building properties that will have a value beyond their first use.

Will McKee CBE (Chair, Tilfen Land and the Outer London Commission): Nicky, can I just make one other point very quickly because nobody has made it yet? They get worried about this idea that nowhere in the suburbs can you actually build anything that is of a high, if not a higher, density. That is not true. There is a general acceptance in the outer London areas of higher-rise in town centres, higher-rise around transport nodes, higher-rise on areas of opportunity or intensification. There is no problem with that at all.

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): Is there any evidence for that? I have not seen that evidence. What is your evidence for that?

Will McKee CBE (Chair, Tilfen Land and the Outer London Commission): These are parts of London in which the plans identified --

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): Whether that is widely publicly agreed is the problem.

Will McKee CBE (Chair, Tilfen Land and the Outer London Commission): Yes, pretty much, yes.

Steve O'Connell AM (Deputy Chair): Is it accepting the survey of local plans I can speak for for district survey ---

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): Yes, it is in the plans, but is it accepted by the electorate?

Will McKee CBE (Chair, Tilfen Land and the Outer London Commission): The reason it had wide acceptance was because in the larger sites and the intensification sites it can create a place of its own. What Berkley Homes tries to do on some of these bigger schemes is to create a place, not just put houses there.

The point I just wanted to make, because it is really important, is that if you increase the density in suburban centres, then you are actually contributing not just to the London housing issue but to the future of town centres. Without that intensification, they are facing an even bleaker future than the one they are actually facing. If you look at putting high densities around transport nodes, you are actually putting something into the Mayor's sustainable transport policy. If you look at intensification and opportunity areas, they are mostly brownfield, are they not, Colin?

Colin Wilson (Senior Manager, Planning Decisions, GLA): Yes.

Will McKee CBE (Chair, Tilfen Land and the Outer London Commission): Yes. You are looking at actually taking development into brownfield sites. There are quite significant areas of policy where housing densification is not just about increasing the number of units in London. It is actually about contributing to other important London Plan policies and I do not think we should lose sight of that.

The interesting thing about it if we are talking about public acceptance is that there is public acceptance of that in outer London. On all of our trips all the way around, we found no real resistance to those principles.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Intensification around public transport hubs?

Will McKee CBE (Chair, Tilfen Land and the Outer London Commission): Yes, that was (overspeaking)

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Car-free?

Will McKee CBE (Chair, Tilfen Land and the Outer London Commission): Occasionally, but in outer London --

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): That gives you more land and makes it more marketable.

Will McKee CBE (Chair, Tilfen Land and the Outer London Commission): Not all the transport hubs in outer London are in town centres.

Steve O'Connell AM (Deputy Chair): It does not need to be car-free.

Will McKee CBE (Chair, Tilfen Land and the Outer London Commission): If I can give you one example, look at Bexley. Bexleyheath Railway Station is miles from Bexley town centre, but there is an acceptance that that is an area around which there could be intensification, because of the existence of the transport hub.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): All right. Thank you. We have done enough on measuring and we will move on to policy. We have covered a lot of other issues apart from that.

Dr Onkar Sahota AM: Can you tell me what the practical difference is between the 2008 policy of maximising house potential and the 2011 policy of optimising potential? What is the difference between the two, please?

Richard Lavington (Maccreevor Lavington Architects): Optimising is the idea that it takes into account a lot of other issues other than just the number. In a way, it is what Colin [Wilson] was saying earlier. Density is only one measurement. It is not necessarily aimless in its own right. There is a whole range of other things that need to be taken into account as well.

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): Given that - and I think you cite the number yourself - about 50% of current developments are actually maxing out and going beyond the current matrix, in terms of the outcomes I cannot perceive the difference. I am sure there is one and I am sure Colin can speak to the difference eloquently.

Richard Lavington (Maccreevor Lavington Architects): We do not know what would have happened if it had stayed with maximising.

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): Yes. We cannot go back in time to rerun the last ten years. I give you that.

Dr Onkar Sahota: Colin, do you have a view?

Colin Wilson (Senior Manager, Planning Decisions, GLA): Yes. Essentially, it is partly a nuance thing. The original policy talked about maximising with local context and then optimising, as Richard said, and opening them out, as I have already said, to wider planning objectives. The crucial wide planning objective

amongst that was the Housing Design Guide, which became the HSPG. It is not just about the change of maybe one or two words in the policy, but it is also about a change in the wider policy approach within the new London Plan; and it is also about a change in the approach of developers and development and what they are trying to market.

I would say that that change should not just be read as that one policy having had a word changed. Lots of other things have changed around it and particularly the one about the HSPG and the design quality issue which was the most important. That gave a tremendous amount of leverage for local authorities and for the GLA about quality, but that was not done in the teeth of opposition from developers. Developers were becoming more sophisticated in the London market about the quality of the product they were trying to develop.

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): Can I come back on one of the points you were making earlier? Colin had other comments about the Housing Design Guide, which you responded to and we then moved on. This is coming to your question, but perhaps at 45 degrees.

First of all, anecdotally, certainly in the conversations I had looking at the Heygate, talking to people who were running the local consultation there, I kept putting to them, "Why do you need all this development here? Why has it happened there?" What it actually came to was, "It has to be there because the rules say that we have to provide this many homes". I was not privy to private conversations that happened in the Heygate development, but certainly that was the reason that was given out very recently - last year - as to why such big spacing and massing was required.

On the Housing Design Guide and the London SPG, I guess I am probably the only person who is less comfortable with where that is. There is lots of good stuff in it with lots of good intentions. There are some great overarching statements. This is the Design Guide and the appendices are that much and obviously you have the London Plan as well. Buried away in the detail, as often happens - and I have some background in other bits of regulation - when you get into well-intentioned, complex regulation with lots of agendas coming in and lots of stuff that is part of the 50 pages or 100 pages, you get unintended consequences. It is inevitable. There are - and certainly for the developers I have spoken to and some planners - quite a lot of unintended consequences coming through.

Firstly, there is the ban on recycling open space into anything else, which you can sort of get around, but that makes it very hard to take a late 1950s, 1960s or 1970s estate-type formulation and turn that back into conventional streets; because you have to move it into gardens which are either private or communal and which do not count as public open space. There are planners who can argue their way through that and there are examples where they have managed to move the numbers a bit. I do not think I have seen the very latest, but certainly in the quite recent plans for the Aylesbury Estate, which was obviously just agreed the other day, despite the fact that that is just north of a park, the amount of public open space as defined in that stays pretty much the same. Aylesbury has 115 units per hectare at the moment. In order to get up to the 180 or 190 units per hectare that they need to get to, it is forcing a degree of big multi-storey and semi-high-rise that we just know statistically most people do not like. My overarching concern is that if we continue to create a build form that we know statistically most people, if you ask them, do not like as much as normal terraced streets of houses and medium-rise flats; then we are making the politics and the planning system far harder than it needs to be.

There are a range of other rules that do actually make it hard to build maximum density conventional terraced streets of houses. I will not cite them all but I think some of you have perhaps seen our papers on this. There are rules on staircases. There are rules on disabled access. There are rules on parking. There are rules on bathrooms. There are rules on lavatories. There are rules on a whole range of things that mean that with a

vertically accessed tight terraced house, or with vertically accessed flats off one stairwell, you cannot be as spatially efficient as they were in 1880 or 1820 or 1780. In order to get something that sort of typologically fits – and I absolutely agree with what you were saying earlier and there is some great stuff being done – it is very hard to do it in a street-based format with anything like the density of some of the stuff that was done 100 years ago.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): First of all, there were different health and safety standards then. Secondly, they did not have cars, did they? It is all going to be a bit different, is it not, now?

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): The bits of London that were done then seem to work in terms of car-parking space and in central London we are trying to move to a world where we need fewer cars and we are encouraging public transport.

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): The average car-parking bay is 5½ metres long and the average frontage on a Victorian house is 7 metres, so you just put one in front of it.

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): It works perfectly well and if we end up with slightly fewer cars, I suspect most people would be quite happy with that.

Richard Lavington (Maccleanor Lavington Architects): One very efficient way of delivering family housing at a certain density is with narrow-frontage terraced houses, but actually Lifetime Homes is very obstructive to making that work particularly well. Once you get to three bedrooms, you need a very large bathroom on the entry level and that actually obstructs the width of the plan; which means you have to go into a very narrow kitchen and through that into a living space at the back.

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): If you look at some of the houses – nice houses – that have been done recently in bits of south London that meet the Lifetime Homes Standards, they are not as spatially efficient as things done 100 years ago. The consequence is, therefore, to get to the density targets and to meet the open space targets and this, that and the other, you then need to do a big point block or a big multi-storey next to it. There are existing examples of that.

Richard Lavington (Maccleanor Lavington Architects): Then in that situation you are prioritising the lifetime use of the home and disabled access over its efficiency and use for a family; a family without disabled kids and things like that, admittedly. We are applying that across every new-build single home in London.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Only 10% are wheelchair accessible.

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): For the Lifetime Homes it is (over-speaking)

Richard Lavington (Maccleanor Lavington Architects): That is fine, but it is for the Lifetime Homes.

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): When first created, Lifetime Homes had the intention of a rural/suburban context --

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): You could convert it.

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): -- and also, as first intention, it would not be 100% of new homes. The two things that are different in London are (1) obviously, much of London is a dense, urban context but still with the same requirements and (2) critically, we have made the decision to require it for 100% of new homes as opposed to a certain percentage. Certainly, Create Streets would argue very, very

strongly that it is perfectly appropriate to keep Lifetime Homes for a percentage of new builds, but not for 100% and that the perverse consequences of doing that – and I am not talking about design and what it looks like but about typology, exactly the point Richard made very well – is that we cannot build today in London with the same density the provably most popular forms of housing; which are terraced houses and vertically accessed flats or Pimlico style. We cannot recreate it with the same density. That must be insane.

Richard Lavington (Maccreanor Lavington Architects): That is what I was talking about.

Colin Wilson (Senior Manager, Planning Decisions, GLA): Yes, that was your point, but I do not think that that actually is the case. The Kidbrooke scheme has five-metre bay terraced houses that are Lifetime Homes and they are a very nicely designed scheme. There are about 200 of them built, very popular, a lovely scheme. We were down there last week.

In terms of the rules, it is worth saying that the rule on staircases, if you can point it out to me, I would be interested to see it because there is not a --

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): It is 3.28, 3.13 and 4.10.2.

Colin Wilson (Senior Manager, Planning Decisions, GLA): There is not a rule and I do not think any of those things say that there is a minimum width of staircase.

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): There is a minimum width, a minimum angle, minimum height, absolutely.

Colin Wilson (Senior Manager, Planning Decisions, GLA): No, none of those things say there is a minimum width of staircase in the HSPG. If you look at the current guidance that we are operating on, it is the HSPG. There is nothing about minimum width of stairs in that and there is nothing in the building regulations about minimum width of stairs. It does say in the building regulations that they advise not go below 800 millimetres. That is for fairly practical purposes because I am probably getting close to 800 millimetres wide. I do not think that is a driver for not building terraced housing. Even if it were, people are building terraced housing and they are doing it really well.

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): Yes, no matter what it says, it is happening. It has not been kicked into touch.

Richard Lavington (Maccreanor Lavington Architects): It is happening. I do not think it is preventing terraced houses being built, but it is preventing the plans of them internally being as nice as they could be.

Male Speaker: (over-speaking) efficient as they could be.

Richard Lavington (Maccreanor Lavington Architects): Also, Lifetime Homes is about designing homes that people can live in throughout their whole lives. Actually, I do not know whether in London we can afford to have family terraced houses that we expect people to live their whole lives in, because there are not enough of them for everyone to live in terraced houses. Actually, if we are going to deal with the growing population in London, it relies on people living in different types of accommodation at different stages of their lives.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Any counterarguments to that?

Colin Wilson (Senior Manager, Planning Decisions, GLA): On the point of Lifetime Homes, is it difficult to get a toilet on the ground floor with a five-metre bay? Yes, it then constrains what you can do with the

kitchen next door to it, but people can certainly do it and I have seen plans for that. Is it your ideal plan? No. What are the upsides and downsides of that? I live in a flat with my children. None of us is disabled and it is quite convenient to have more than one toilet. We do not have it. If it was built to the Lifetime Homes Standards, I would probably appreciate that, so we would not have to queue to go to the loo in the morning and the evening.

However, I do not think it is the case that anything in the HSPG is preventing the delivery of terraced housing because it is being built and it is being built very well in lots of locations. Stonebridge Park was being built over ten years ago. It continues to be built. I do not think the width of stairs constrains that. Most of the building regulations certainly around stairs are basically a health and safety issue about risers and treads. However there is quite a lot of flexibility in the building regulations on that point as well, so I do not think that is a key driver for a lot of building of housing.

On the point of estate redevelopment, possibly what you might be getting slightly confused on is that in some large estates, there are large areas of land which are designated as metropolitan open land - Kidbrooke is one - and there are not any rules in the HSPG or the London Plan about not building on open space in estate redevelopments. In fact, at Kidbrooke they have built on open space because they have rearranged the metropolitan open land (MOL). In South Kilburn they have built on open space, some of which was objected to by local people. They built on a piece of roadway, a gyratory, and what they are putting back there is what you are promoting and certainly what we would seek to promote as well, which is traditional homes with front doors and streets. In many respects, they are putting the street pattern back in Brent.

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): Barking Riverside is nearly all terrace houses, very good examples. It can be done. I am sorry. Perhaps I overstated it. It can be done at level densities but it cannot be done at the densities that are popular and that allow you to do it in inner London, central London or urban London; because you cannot get to the same spatial density because you need wider, shallower staircases. You need to find a room for the lavatory. You need to find a room for (over-speaking)

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Could you not do maisonettes and then flats above them?

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): That means you are getting to a slightly less popular typology, potentially. You can build things but --

Richard Lavington (Maccleanor Lavington Architects): There are cases, as with any regulation, with time to refine things. Basically, the London Housing Design Guide embodies Lifetime Homes and there are a few anomalies within Lifetime Homes that could be improved. Basically, the overall document is correct and the reason why it used Lifetime Homes originally is because it was trying to capture other well-recognised standards and not create a completely new standard. The question is whether Lifetime Homes have an evolution over time.

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): Certainly what we would suggest is that it just is not required for 100% of new homes.

Richard Lavington (Maccleanor Lavington Architects): I think there is a good argument for that.

Colin Wilson (Senior Manager, Planning Decisions, GLA): On that point, if I could just make a point about the HSPG, it is a lot of documents and you have to be careful about unintended consequences. It will enable regulation and I absolutely agree with that. Paragraph 2.1.13, on page 49 of the HSPG sums up something which is really important to understand in the HSPG and its operation in London. That is, that within the good practice and the baseline standards, it is very clear that failure to meet one standard does not

mean to say that you are failing to meet the aspirations of the HSPG. It is very much a balance. It goes back to this thing about seeing design and housing as a totality, not just a series of tick-boxes where, if you get ten out of ten you get planning permission and if you get nine you do not. That is absolutely the intention of this thing, that supplementary guidance is to be guidance, not a set of rules. Largely within London it is not being applied as a set of rules. Some people criticise us for being too flexible in its application and certainly we have never encouraged anybody to take the HSPG and say, "Unless you meet 100% of the requirements in it, you are not going to get planning permission or you are producing a bad scheme".

Richard Lavington (Maccreanor Lavington Architects)(?): I think that is probably true..

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): From my personal experience, it is practically the case that when you talk to certain developers and investors about certain schemes and what could or could not be done there; in a range of instances I have heard people say, "We could not do that", ie put in a similar form of dense terrace houses, "because with Lifetime Homes the rules would just mean you could not do it". Could you argue your way around it? Are there bits in the housing standards which disagree with it or are sensible or are explicitly to do with flexibility? Yes, there absolutely are. However, in many cases, particularly in the higher land value or urban areas, if people know that they are going to have to argue their way around a whole bunch of rules - all things being equal, particularly when actually they know they can get to the high density, multi-storey option - why go for the medium-rise with higher cost because more lifts are required and it is harder to get the typology to work, when you know you are going to be battling uphill against some of the key rules. That, certainly in our practical experience, is what we have seen happening and is what other people are telling us happens.

Just coming back to the open space, I would agree. I am not claiming and I apologise if I came over as claiming that there are specific rules preventing the recycling of open space in estate regeneration. However, it is worth stating that key indicator three of the London Plan is to ensure no net loss of open space and, again, in the conversations we have been having people are saying, "Therefore, that makes us pretty less inclined to be doing anything else with open space because we know we are going to get that challenge", and quite rightly. It is right that there is a challenge on that. However, where we have come from is that when you have large amounts of small bits of open space which are a public amenity, and we are not defining garden as being open space, it does just mean spatially you cannot go back in its entirety from an estate formulation to a street-based formulation. Given that those are proving more popular, is that a sensible way for the plan to be impacting on what gets built.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): It does sound as though it can help because we have just been hearing about Kidbrooke.

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): Yes, I was deliberately not making comments on Kidbrooke. Kidbrooke works spatially because you have large chunks of open land there. It is not going back to a street-based typology. It is going back to some streets, not particularly spatially efficient, and big blocks and big open land. I would argue that Kidbrooke is pretty similar to what was there before; it just looks nicer.

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): One of the problems is actually about the business model of terraced housing, because when you are building terraced houses you are effectively building a high-rise building on its side. It is one single building that starts at one end of the street and ends at the other with a much slower sales rate than apartment building and also a higher per-unit cost. There is more capital locked up. There is a slower sales rate. There is a higher risk. Those are probably actually all more influential than the current regulations and why they do not need more of them.

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): That is not what developers I have spoken to tell me. They would say exactly the opposite.

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): The developers on my board tell me exactly that.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): It is not that capital is not --

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): No. Again, in central London it is very hard, but the capital required to build terraced houses is much lower because you do not need to build ten of them before you can sell one of them. You can build them as you go along. There is not the same degree of risk.

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): You cannot move people in halfway down the street when you are building a terrace. You cannot do that, so you will end up with the same scenario as an apartment building. It could take you two years to build and sell 40 units, whereas in an apartment building you might build and sell the whole lot in 12 months.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Sorry, just with the rate and amount of building going on, I cannot believe you cannot sell some of the houses at the beginning of a street if you are building at the end of the street.

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): No, I am saying move people in. You cannot legally complete and take the money off the purchasers while it is a construction site.

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): I did not know that. Again, that is an interesting rule that should be changed.

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): I think it is more their own health and safety audits that would say it is not a good idea.

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): I have not heard that before, but if that is true, that is important.

Richard Lavington (Maccleanor Lavington Architects): You need to put the houses that you have completed outside the construction site with a hoarding. You could do that. Often we are asked to put narrow breaks in terraces, which makes them discrete buildings. That allows them to be more easily built and are useful to get to the back of.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): I wanted to go to the construction costs, so it does bring us to that. I wanted to bring in Duncan [Bowie], actually.

Dr Onkar Sahota AM: We were talking earlier on about the cost of land, but what is the likely impact of ever-increasing passing of land costs on density, tenure mix and scheme design; and how profitable is it just to build upwards.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): We have covered some of this. Try not to cover the same ground. We have already heard --

Colin Wilson (Senior Manager, Planning Decisions, GLA): Yes, as we were saying, it depends where you are. There are places where developers are not approaching us or anyone else to do high-rise because it is too expensive. In Barking and Dagenham and Barking Reach has been referred to. What succeeds there is terraced housing, very nicely put together terraced housing, in a very nice setting. There are other parts of

Barking and Dagenham, as I said, where they are redeveloping. There is a private development that English Partnerships owns and then HCA owns Lymington Fields, which is primarily streets with terraced houses. There are some flats, but it is mostly streets and terraced houses because that is what drives the market in that part of London. It is very different from Blackfriars Road, as you would expect. It is appropriate for the location and the market that it is pitching to in that particular part of suburban London. It does not mean to say it is the answer to all bits of suburban London.

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): My assumption is that the answer to your question must be that it is more profitable. It is potentially more successful for the developers. The flipside to that and the thing that worries me is that if you bang up 20 or 30 towers around London, you could end up with a scenario where if the market turns sour, or something went wrong with the exchange rate, or something changed fundamentally with the rest of the world's appetite for London, we could have a lot of buildings that will really not be compatible with the United Kingdom (UK) housing market. There is some massive risk. We could end up with the equivalent of 30 residential centre-points.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Thirty residential centre-points?

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): That does not sound bad.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): What is the answer to that, Colin, the idea that if you keep putting up towers there is a tremendous risk? We are just talking about the economics, really, of construction and how it affects density.

Colin Wilson (Senior Manager, Planning Decisions, GLA): Yes, there is a reasonable caution amongst developers about putting up towers at great risk, which is perhaps why they are not proliferating quite as much as people think they are. It is less risk to do lower rise and higher density where there is a market and where it fits with the local context. There are a lot of taller buildings in Tower Hamlets. Certainly Tower Hamlets was delivering more housing than Birmingham over the last five years or so, of which there was a fair proportion of high-rise. It comes back to this context. Does it fit in in that place at this time? It is not going to work in lots of lots of areas. Maybe 90% of London is not really going to change in our own lifetimes. If you go up into Brent and Barnet, if you go to Barnhill and Finsbury, it is a different type of typology, suburban semi-detached. The graph of the statistics shows London's density going up, but for 80% of people's experience in London, nothing much will change. There are opportunity areas and there are town centres where it will change. Yes, it is related to the debate about whether it is right that that is high-rise or what the forms are; but there are plenty of places in London where people are not going to be building high-rise buildings. It does not make any sense to build that. I do not think either the Plan or the HSPG strong-arms people into one approach. It is very much saying, "There are lots of different approaches to housing. Let us try to encourage best practice in all typologies, not just one at the expense of others".

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): I am just wondering. One of the issues is how profitable it is. You were talking about risk. Is it to build upwards? Why are we seeing - and maybe we are seeing - more and more going upwards?

Will McKee CBE (Chair, Tilfen Land and the Outer London Commission): Could I just remind you of the point earlier on? You can only carry on building upwards to the point at which the costs of building upwards do not exceed the sales value of the building you are putting up. That is the real barrier to going too high and it just does not happen. If developers want to be in business tomorrow, it does not happen because they will lose money and they will possibly become insolvent.

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): It is a function of value. The only reason you do not get a tower block in the middle of Dorset is that it is not profitable.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): We have an issue now where a huge crisis seems to be underway because the land prices are rocketing, so more and more of London on the face of that could go upwards. Partly, maybe it is a bit chicken-and-egg. Maybe they are rocketing because of the density allowed.

Will McKee CBE (Chair, Tilfen Land and the Outer London Commission): Again, we just have to be really careful. There are so many different housing markets inside London. We keep talking about it as if there is one housing market. There is not. Land values in outer London are not rocketing. If anything, they are still not back to where they were in 2008 by a long chalk. That is why some of our sites are empty still. The economics of building them out just do not add up yet. We are still waiting for values to climb to the point where actually you can make a reasonable profit, not an excessive profit. If you are talking about --

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): You mean we have to look forward to and we need more rising land values?

Will McKee CBE (Chair, Tilfen Land and the Outer London Commission): Absolutely. And I will probably get accused of land-lording, but if you look along the South Bank, it is not the case. That is a completely different marketplace. Even the people there who are building residential towers are still building them against the perceived undersupply and against the demand which they believe exists. I just think the one thing you cannot do is generalise. That is what Colin [Wilson] was saying. There is not one rule that applies to the London housing markets.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): No, we know it is many submarkets, but the general trend is upwards.

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): It is not unreasonable to say that prices in London will continue to move upwards because there is constraint on the supply of land and it is politically difficult to change the planning system to make more land available for that. In many cases, that is not the case, but as a vague generalisation I do not think it is unreasonable. Where Create Streets would come from is well let us make it easier politically to build more. We are all (over-speaking)

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Wait a minute. You are saying there are constraints on the supply of land. You are saying the land is not coming forward.

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): Talking about outer London, he is giving a specific example and I am generalising.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): There are stacks of land in outer London - we know that - and very, very low density, so the idea that there is a constraint is interesting. Can I bring Duncan [Bowie] in from the audience?

Duncan Bowie: Do you want me to come up to the table?

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Yes, come to the table, Duncan. Do you want to just introduce yourself, Duncan?

Duncan Bowie: Yes, Duncan Bowie. I was the Principal Planning Officer here who was responsible for the amendments in the 2008 London Plan on the density matrix and wrote the original Housing Supplementary Planning Guide. I am now a lecturer at the University of Westminster. I represented the Town and Country Planning Association at the examination-in-public into the London Plan. I have also undertaken research projects on the development of housing funding, both for this Committee and for the Housing Committee of

the Assembly in the last 18 months or so; including focusing on density issues in the report I did for this Committee.

Can I pick up on a couple of the earlier points and then pick up on the economics? Can I do it that way, Chair?

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Yes, but I would like us to have a dialogue, too.

Duncan Bowie: Yes, of course, but there were a couple of points earlier that I would wish to refer to.

The first is the facts of what the density levels are, because the Mayor actually publishes this in the Annual Monitoring Report and we are still waiting for last year's Annual Monitoring Report, which is coming out fairly soon. It should have been out ten days ago, so we are a year behind on the data. However, it is important, especially since Paul [Watling] in his introduction referred, when giving his examples, to some specific schemes and implied that 70 dwellings per hectare was the average. That was the case seven or eight years ago. It is now 140 to 150 and has actually been so, for the last six or seven years under both mayoral regimes. That is on average. Obviously, if you are looking at individual schemes, they can be as low as 20 or they can be as high as 2,000 dwellings per hectare in specific cases, ie four times the top of the density matrix.

Reference has already been made to the 50% to 60% of schemes over the last seven years above the density policy in the matrix. That raises issues from some perspectives of whether we are ignoring sustainable residential quality principles in the plan, or whether there is a debate about modifying the guidance in relation to them. The HSPG gives guidance on exceptional density above and below the ranges, but in a situation where we actually still have in the annual plan the target of a 5% variation allowed, 50% to 60% clearly raises questions. That was one of the reasons the density policy in 2008 was changed, but it has not actually had much effect.

Questions have been asked about the actual definitions. The definitions in 2008 shift the whole policy from dwellings per hectare to habitable rooms per hectare. That was intentional. They also reintroduced the concept of building a range of housing types in different locations to allow for family housing where appropriate in central London and, smaller homes in suburban London where appropriate; but we were actually driving provision to a certain extent based on housing requirements, demand and the varying markets in different areas.

A question was raised about the issue of density definitions and amenity space. The London Plan always used the Government definition in Planning Policy Statement 3 (PPS 3) as it was of incidental amenity space being included within the density calculation. In 2010 the Government deleted the density policy in the national planning guidance and, interestingly, the footnote that was in the London Plan version in 2011 actually was specific about cross-referring to that. Interestingly enough, the footnote definition is no longer in the current version of the London Plan because it was based on national guidance that disappeared. It would have actually been useful to keep that, especially given the considerable confusion around the table on that.

The critical issue is the distinction between higher density and hyper density. Some, including Andy [von Bradsky], who has left, were actually referring to this and the super density report which used 200 as a threshold. I use the term 'hyper density' for schemes above the top of the density matrix, which in the current version is 405 dwellings per hectare, or 1,100 habitable rooms per hectare. The emphasis, therefore, needs to be on how we actually get more medium density schemes to provide family housing rather than the issue of hyper density. Where, as others have said, and I think Nicholas [Boys Smith] said earlier, that it is almost impossible to get family housing however you design the scheme, if you are talking about densities of 1,000, 1,500 or 2,000 dwellings per hectare and above, which is effectively high density.

There is lots of research on the correlation between density, affordable housing and output mix. I did a full examination for a Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) conference in 2008, which I think David [Birkbeck] remembers and others might have been involved in that. It would be interesting to see an analysis since, but, bluntly, when you get to very high densities, you do not get family units and you generally do not get affordable housing. You may get a few smaller marginally submarket rentals in a new affordable rent regime, but you actually also do not generally get significant funds to transfer offsite.

That also relates to the development economics which we have just been discussing. There is an issue about the extent to which landowners and developers know that if they can get a scheme which is double the density in the published policy, which happens on a daily basis, inevitably that increases the return to the landowner and possibly the developer as well. The nature of development has actually been determined to a certain extent, obviously, by profit margins; and that has changed increasingly with the international investment, which is actually driven by asset appreciation rather than by homeowners wanting to live anywhere. The difficulty we have had is that the high density has pushed up land values, but also there are clearly issues, as others have mentioned, about the relationship with costs. The development economics basically means that if you are building high-rise 30, 40 or 50 storeys, you are paying two to three times per unit in build costs per square metre than if you are building low-rise. That only works if you get prime values in central London, which is primarily driven by the international investment market. It certainly does not work, as Will McKee and others have been saying, in suburban areas and that is why so many of the suburban developments, especially those given planning consent before the recession in 2008, are still not viable. On house price changes, inner London boroughs in some cases are now 30% or 40% above the pre-recession peak. Some outer London boroughs are still 5%, 10% or 15% below, so they have not caught up. As Will McKee was saying, some of the early schemes are not viable as yet, partly because they were predicated on very high densities.

We have to recognise that there are quite negative consequences of pushing hyper density to the extent we are and the proposals in the revised London Plan today for even higher density in opportunity areas, are problematic unless there is actually social infrastructure. The critical issue is what homes we get. We have to move away from the obsession with numbers to actually look at quality, what type of housing we are actually trying to build where and - even though through planning we cannot control the use - what kind of housing we build does impact on who uses it. A lot of the whole development economics of London, especially on prime sites, are driven by the international investment market, which is not giving us the housing we actually need for Londoners either in terms of affordability, built form or ranges of bedroom size.

I am very concerned at the proposals. The London Plan in a sense is recognised worldwide for its principles of sustainable residential quality, which link to the space standards and components of Lifetime Homes and energy efficiency standards. That is as comprehensive a policy perspective as you actually get. The failure to implement them because of market circumstances is actually the problem and, trying to implement them more strictly, while allowing for variations in situations, is actually the best way not to just get the best output of affordable housing, but actually make sure that more housing is affordable.

The focus has to shift to how we get incremental increases in density in the suburbs, not just high-rise development in the town centres, and even looking at urban extensions. If we need to get anywhere near the housing requirements of 49,000 to 80,000 a year, depending on whose figures you use, clearly a capacity study of 42,000 a year which is actually predicated on very high density including hyper density on most opportunity areas and town centres, is not actually going to do what we need. We may get lots of housing, but whether it is the housing we need is the problem. We have got to reverse the trends of the last seven or eight years, which have just produced the wrong kind of housing in the wrong places for the wrong kind of people. Any attempt to just try to hype up the density even further is a very serious mistake indeed.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): That was very good because you covered all of the earlier stuff and now we have landed on the construction costs and so on. A very simple statement at the end about housing being built insofar as it was the wrong thing in the wrong place.

Duncan Bowie: It was intended to be. I have published volumes on this and papers and so forth. The evidence is all there and in the public arena.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Yes. I think not everyone on the panel. Anyway, what does the panel think?

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): If we could redevelop more land as housing, as terraced streets, as reasonable flats, not as hyper density – über density is my favourite phrase – but we carry on moving to that, it will be the right thing to do. I do not disagree at all.

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): It is a more secure solution, what Nicholas is proposing. The direction of travel at the moment is to go for something that might just come off if everything continues in the same direction at the same heat, but I do not think it necessarily will. The idea that Duncan was suggesting and that Nicholas supported was to go for intensifying suburbia by a small increment but on a grand scale because there is so much of it. I anticipate that it will be a sustainable model for 25 years, pretty much whatever happens.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Do you agree with that?

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): I was not expecting support from David. I am very grateful.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Is there general support for large-scale developments in the suburbs but on an incremental level?

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): You see this quite regularly. You go somewhere like Dublin where they have decided to try to build apartments for people who do not want apartments. What they do is they disguise them as terraced houses and you get streets of what look like the four-storey terraced houses that we are all so familiar with all over London and they are actually double-stacked maisonettes. It seems to look just like the rest of Dublin's heritage --

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): We have those typologies in the existing city. They are converted terrace houses. They are all over the place.

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): We are not building them in the same way at the moment. In the last poll I am aware of, which was a MORI poll done at the end of last year for IMG, 3% of British people wanted to live in an apartment building with more than 10 units in it. It was the preferred option of 3% and that is what we are specialising in. Clearly, London is always going to have a far higher proportion of those than elsewhere. That is something else we have been saying. To end up with a system where the rules, the density targets, the economics and the external capital flows are pushing us in the direction of maximising the 3% that some people want to live in versus the other 97% seems to me to be perverse. I defer to the member of the Committee, but it must lead to a politics of regeneration and a building that is higher than it used to be.

Certainly the nirvana I would dream of would be if you could get broader public support for redevelopment. Make it easier to regenerate estates, infill sites and bits of London at a lower density than we are currently targeting. Not at the über high densities, not at the top-end of the matrix but at the top-end Pimlico style

densities, 1,500, 1,600 in terrace streets with some of those parking issues, accepting you are not going to have a car in every bid. Then I think it is likely, based on the figures of what people prefer that you would get much more public support.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Can I ask you, would you not disagree about higher densities around public transport hubs?

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): Higher, no.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): You would not be espousing the terraced streets around public transport, at Blackfriars or even Harrow?

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): I guess two things. One, I would actually get a panel of people who live there to decide and support what gets put up. My strong assumption, based on numbers, is that nine times out of ten, local people would not support it and we would go with them on that. Clearly you would have higher densities.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): You do not agree with the PTAL rate? You do not agree with the linking of accessibility and density?

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): No, I am not disagreeing with the linkage. I think I am disagreeing with the gradient of the matrix, if you see what I mean?

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): OK, so a matter of degree?

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): Yes. Anyway, it has become irrelevant because 50% are above the matrix.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): What about anybody else?

Richard Lavington (Maccreanor Lavington Architects): I think one example might be a safe development like Kings Cross which because of the height, there is only one building so far that is above 16 residential stories generally. Sixteen residential stories is tall, it is a tower. Actually pretty much all of the rest of Kings Cross will be at that sort of height so it is only just emerging now. Actually it is an exceptionally central bit of London. If you want to get anywhere close to delivering the housing growth that London needs in places that are so well connected and such desirable places to live, we need to be building at those sort of densities.

I think as you go further out people expect a different type of quality of living environment because they are not as central. I think everyone in the private market, and therefore why not in all markets, accepts that if you are going to live very centrally you need to make some compromises.

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): Some compromises, yes.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): You would not have built in Kings Cross at those densities?

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): I think Argent are good developers. Are you the architects on it before I go any further? I cannot remember.

Richard Lavington (Maccreanor Lavington Architects): On one of the buildings.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): What are they? Not the 16-storey, the rest are about what level?

Richard Lavington (Maccleanor Lavington Architects): They are pretty much 16, I think.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): They are not all 16?

Richard Lavington (Maccleanor Lavington Architects): It depends. They are not all residential. Some of them are office buildings so that is far fewer floors. Actually there are some lower buildings on the edges. Basically there is essentially a plane across the top of most of the site which is a cut-off to do with views of St Paul's from Hampstead Heath and places like that; and that limits the height of development. Obviously the development tries to get as much in as possible (over-speaking)

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): I can use the excuse I have not come to the table with an alternative master plan for King's Cross. I have not got an answer to that question. Directionally, shooting from the hip slightly, I think if you have a high-density development there which is perhaps a bit more finely grained than what is currently being done, so with streets, whether it is six, eight or ten stories; I am not quite clear but that sort of range is high-density. A lot of small probably one or two unit flats because that is also appropriate for that sort of place, absolutely fine. However where they are pushing up to the degree that we are doing, have done there, are doing elsewhere, plan to do elsewhere, have in the matrix; whether that is helping engender the degree of public support to make it easier to unlock the planning systems, get more developments, I would question.

Sorry I do not know the numbers, but if we do end up with social housing in that typology, I come back to the point Duncan [Bowie] made earlier and I alluded to earlier, the evidence, admittedly in some quite old research on the whole, is off the scale clear. Putting people in social housing or with kids in big multi-storey blocks is very heavily correlated to bad outcomes for those people. As I say, I actually do not know what is going in to that site, perhaps I should do. Things change. Situations change. Political pressures change. It is quite possible stuff gets rezoned, re-phased, re-planned and who knows where we end up.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Colin, can you just remind us what the density is of King's Cross?

Colin Wilson (Senior Manager, Planning Decisions, GLA): I cannot remember, but it is an example where there are some high-rise buildings in there, one I think Richard was involved in the design of, some of which I think go up to about 15 stories or so. There are some which are which are down at eight and ten. Dolphin Square, which was referred to earlier, and you have St George's square which is a Georgian square, next to a 1930s square, next to 1950s and 1960s developments - different densities. Different approaches to design but, to me, typify really what London is all about, which is a variety of type and a variety of approach and a choice of those in which to live. I think what we try to encapsulate in the plan is an approach which allows that variety, which is absolutely essential to make the city succeed.

I think a one size fits all approach, which I assume nobody is promoting, is absolutely doomed to failure in the same way as the one size fits all approach in the 1960s and 1970s failed. The great thing about this city, and the people who design it, and the people who plan for it, is that it allows for variety, appropriate to context.

I do not agree, you are probably not surprised to hear, with Duncan's [Bowie] sweeping assertion that it is the wrong houses for the wrong people. Lots of people write to us objecting to things that we do and were involved with. One of the feedbacks from residents that we do not get in highly dense developments, not all of which are high-rise, is that, "You built the wrong kind of housing for us in the wrong place at the wrong time." We go and visit them. We go and see them and visit people who are living there and often the feedback is very positive.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): I think there is a very big issue there, and it was very true in the first administration to, at the end we recognised we were not building enough family homes. We are now building even fewer family homes, particularly for people on low incomes. There is no denying that fact.

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): Streets would be a better typology for people on low incomes.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): There is an issue about just not providing the family home.

Colin Wilson (Senior Manager, Planning Decisions, GLA): I go back to the point I made earlier, I do not think there is anything in the policy or the HSPG that discourages streets, squares, or spaces. In fact, developers coming forward over the last four years increasingly have those aspects within the schemes.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Colin, is it not true though that we are just not demanding a sufficient level of family housing to make developments, or neighbourhoods even, mixed?

Colin Wilson (Senior Manager, Planning Decisions, GLA): I think one of the very good things that has happened over the last four years is that where you have that high-density of development, an awful lot of thought has gone into that, if that is the case in places which are desirable to live, as Richard said that is primarily central London; how can you accommodate family accommodation and how can it be designed in a way which is thought through, which is thoughtful? You played a part in that, Nicky, with the space standards.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): King's Cross is spacious --

Colin Wilson (Senior Manager, Planning Decisions, GLA): I do not think it is a case that you cannot have family accommodation in those kinds of locations, but it is the nature of spatial planning

Navin Shah AM: Is it not a case of social exclusion here? Why should the families largely not be part of the neighbourhoods that you are creating? Why do you want to drive them away from that?

Colin Wilson (Senior Manager, Planning Decisions, GLA): No, absolutely they can be. I think we do encourage that.

Richard Lavington (Maccreanor Lavington Architects): There are family homes in King's Cross, I mean they are apartments.

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): If you are creating big multi-storey, big high-rise, it is much harder - I am not saying it is impossible - but it is much harder, effectively to provide family homes and tenure blind housing. The best way to provide tenure blind housing, depending on location, is streets of somewhere between medium to high-density depending on which part of London it is in. Then you can provide housing that we know works better for people at the lower end of the social spectrum and for families, as well as providing blocks of one or two-bedroom apartments.

Andy von Bradsky (Chairman, PRP Architects and Chair of the RIBA Housing Group): It is very good, very robust typology. There is --

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): People love it.

Andy von Bradsky (Chairman, PRP Architects and Chair of the RIBA Housing Group): It is not relying on a high level of management for that --

Colin Wilson (Senior Manager, Planning Decisions, GLA): I think your point is that the HSPG and the blend in policy are somehow precluding that --

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): No, I am not saying that. What I am saying is that unintentionally there are rules in there which contradict the strategic statements, as Richard put more eloquently than I did, which make it hard to build with optimum density terrace houses and medium-rise flats. They do not make it impossible. I apologise if I came over meaning that, I did not mean that. They make it harder and economically more difficult.

Richard Lavington (Maccreanor Lavington Architects): One of the drives is coming from developers where they will say there is always a better return per square feet on small flats. Also, they think they can sell them faster than they can houses.

Colin Wilson (Senior Manager, Planning Decisions, GLA): They certainly can right now.

Richard Lavington (Maccreanor Lavington Architects): There are certainly locations where terrace houses make sense and there are certain times in the market where terrace houses make sense. Also, most of the local authorities do not want you to build all of any one particular type or size of housing. As soon as you get a scheme of a certain size you have to be really mixed.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): I want to bring in Steve now, please.

Steve O'Connell AM (Deputy Chair): We talked about the density matrix at some level, presumably. Partly with Duncan's [Bowie] comments because he commented very wisely on the actual percentage of applications that have in fact reached the headroom of the matrix.

The first question around this is that is there any sense in the matrix being at its present levels and should we actually consider increasing the headroom of the matrix? Secondly, we have now finally got to the subject about family housing, should the matrix somehow be reconstructed or tweaked or worked upon to speak more loudly on family housing?

Two points: we have a very high percentage that we are breaching. Colin [Wilson], you are agreeing applications that are beyond your matrix. You said at the beginning the matrix is only part of the conversation, and I accept that. There is a very high degree of breaching. You must have thought about this, are you retaining it so that it is almost like a bargaining tool? When a developer comes along and is breaching it, it gives you more empowerment to ask for things that you want?

I open those couple of questions to the group. Colin, I have named you first.

Colin Wilson (Senior Manager, Planning Decisions, GLA): Yes, I have thought about this and we have discussed it internally. One of the things that I think will be very useful to do is partly to go to Duncan's [Bowie] point about, what has the experience been of building this high-density development over the last ten years? The existing matrix is based on the sustainable residential quality work that was done by the London Planning Advisory Committee (LPAC). It reported in 1997. It was basically based on research work that probably started a couple of years before that in the mid-1990s. At that time there was no London Plan. There was no governance for London. Since then the London Plan has come along. The approach to planning in London has been very different. It has all been about growth and growing the city and in that sense has

been very, very successful. I think what would be useful would be a review, an updated sustainable residential quality study. Design and approach to density and mix of typologies has come an awful long way in the intervening nearly 14, 15, 16, 17 years since that work was done.

Yes, our key work was basically based on looking at suburban London. Based on looking at bits of Kensington and Chelsea and saying, "OK, they are types, we can measure those, that is sustainable." I do think we need to look at the experience, both where it has worked and where it has not worked. Certainly there are examples that I know of, that have been built in parts of London you go back and you think, "Blimey, that was not right." I suppose a lot of the conversation battling around this morning is, is it right? Have we got it right or wrong? In fact, importantly I think often left out of this conversation is the people who live in these places. Often they are the last people to be asked. It is the commissariats who say, "Oh, no. It is all wrong. You are doing that wrong. You should be doing this".

Steve O'Connell AM (Deputy Chair): It has been excellent, Chair, but much of it this morning has been around the build environment, quite properly, and we sometimes erroneously overlook the people within those. Nicholas does not, of course, because that is his thing, it is all our thing, but I think your point is a good one, Colin. As I say, the matrix itself seems dated and may not be delivering the outcomes that many people around here want. We also particularly touched upon the requirement and need for families and the right sort of people living in the right sort of places which Will mentioned earlier.

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): Yes, I would like to address in particular the link between the matrix and family housing and, different types of housing. I think actually the matrix should not go any higher as a general rule. I think it would be acceptable to consider when it would be appropriate to have higher density, if you have got, say, mono tenure type development.

I think what is beginning to happen there, and particularly because of the interests of the private rented sector and investing in London, is we are moving away from what was the nirvana of housing design of the last 20 years -to try to work out how to design higher density sustainable communities with mixed tenures - towards trying to work out how to do individual, discrete blocks for different investor models. You will end up with one which is a private rented sector (PRS) building. You will end up with one that is a market sale building. Then you might end up with one which is a social rental, a formal rent or market rent. These might be very closely put together but I think there will be individual buildings, because the private rented sector investor will not buy a building that the bottom 20% of the building is social rent. They are not going to touch it. Likewise they will not necessarily want to mix it up with someone who is doing a market sale either. You will end up beginning to break up the concept of essentially merging flats and houses within buildings and making it a mixed tenure development; in to having a mixed tenure neighbourhood with complementary buildings side by side.

I do not see any reason why some of the PRS stuff should not go as high as they want to go, or the market sale guys go as high as they want to go. I would peg the stuff that is for general housing at a particular density, and not let it go higher than that. I might say, actually, even the London Plan at the moment may be too high on that particular level.

Steve O'Connell AM (Deputy Chair): The people we are talking about there do not necessarily have the choices that they would have in the private world.

Will McKee CBE (Chair, Tilfen Land & Urban Exposure Group): I just want to come in, I have to go in about ten minutes so I apologise for that.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): We are all going in ten minutes.

Will McKee CBE (Chair, Tilfen Land & Urban Exposure Group): Those trends actually were always there. I can remember, through sheer economics, having to build a medium-rise residential block with separate accesses for the different tenure groups; because if I did not and they all used the common parts then you took £30,000 per unit off the sales value straight away. I know all the social arguments about it, and I understand all of that, but the fact is the only way you could have built that thing, because they would not take a community payment, was to say “OK, well that tenure group goes in that entrance, and that tenure group goes in that entrance.” In a way that is separate buildings. They just happen to be joined by bricks.

Can I just make one last comment? I have listened to debates on housing for such a long time. This is not a comment of any regime, but one gets the impression that for a long time now we have been sticking a finger in the dyke and we are just hoping the finger gets bigger to plug the hole in the dyke. If you look back far enough, one of the big trends in housing provision, particularly social housing provision, has been the withdrawal of local authorities from the social housing market. That is the biggest single factor, I think, in the supply of affordable housing in big cities like London. Putting it in to the registered social landlord (RSL) marketplace has not, in my judgement, actually filled the gap. That is the first point.

The second point is that you can shove that burden on to the private house builder in a boom housing market. You cannot shove it on to the private house builder in a housing recession. I was in the Development Corporation. I was watching affordable housing provision slip from 30% down to 5% because that explained how deep we got in to the housing recession.

The third thing is that at some point somebody is going to have to look at the big solutions. Every time I drive past the Dagenham site, it takes you ten minutes to go past it on a train, and it has been empty for nearly 20 years. Nobody is putting in the advance infrastructure works which open up areas like that. Metro-Land was opened up by advance infrastructure works. Canary Wharf 2 was opened up by the promise, and delivery, of advance infrastructure works. We are not going to get these big sites in until somebody grabs that by the scruff of the neck. We do not seem to have the institutional mechanisms any longer. People laugh at the New Towns [Commission] these days for various reasons. The New Towns Commission was a working business model that actually delivered.

The last point that I will make, and then I will be quiet, is that successive South-East Regional Plans and parts of the London Plan over the last 50 years have all talked about high-density PTAL high corridors passing through the Green Belt and releasing development land along those corridors. Terry Farrell [Architect] has just published something on it this week, about actually taking a structural look at London and saying, “Yes, nobody wants to touch the Green Belt” fiddling around at the edges. However, if we go to green wedges, green lands with high-density PTAL efficient development areas between them along the Gatwick corridor, the Stansted corridor, the Luton corridor, the western corridor, the A23 corridor and so on, then you offer up a structural solution.

I just leave you with those thoughts which are a long way, perhaps, just from the density of new housing and looking at the London housing issue. I think it is time to take our finger out of the dyke and actually start looking at some of the bigger structural solutions.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Thank you very much for that, Will. We are leading on the infrastructure plan as a committee or the investigation of it, and we will be coming to those issues. At the moment we have got the further alterations to the London Plan and we have got to deal with things as they are at the moment.

Will McKee CBE (Chair, Tilfen Land & Urban Exposure Group): OK, but you have got the next London Plan coming up within 18 months.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Well, no we have not.

Will McKee CBE (Chair, Tilfen Land & Urban Exposure Group): Start of the process.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): No, we have not. It will be another four years before there is a London Plan, meanwhile there is this. You are right.

Will McKee CBE (Chair, Tilfen Land & Urban Exposure Group): Sorry, I had to just get that off my chest because I have been --

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): I know. I think others might have had things to get off their chest too. I think of those two, one of the things we have not looked at is the relationship of density and environmental infrastructure and the different infrastructures which actually can, of course, be facilitated by high-density. You get sharing of resources etc. Are you going to say something?

Navin Shah AM: Yes. What are the environmental sustainability benefits of high-density housing? Just a broad question--

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): I have been doing some work on this for the last couple of months, for me one of the things that is completely overlooked at the moment is that if you start stacking buildings as high as are being proposed, you are going to end up with the most incredible amount of waste at a single point.

Navin Shah AM: It is a challenge.

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): The historical solution was you took the ground floor and you stuffed it with Euro bins. That is when you were building eight-storey buildings. Now you take it to 16, 24, 36, 42, 45 how do you put that waste anywhere? I think the solution at the moment is let us just have bin lorries come every day to collect the waste, which means you are going to be absolutely cramming the roads with bin lorry collection. This is in a city that has currently got a panic on how dangerous it is to be a cyclist, you are going to multiple the number of heavy vehicle movements. You are also losing the ground floor of every development that could be used for something else which, for making the streets work, is the absolutely crucial part of every building.

Navin Shah AM: My notes indicate here that some of the world's most dense cities are using automated waste collection systems. Is this something that will mitigate, if not actually address, the issues?

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): I think all the cities that go to higher densities are eventually realising it is just impossible to do it with traditional cart collection. The idea that say something like the Vauxhall Nine Elms will be built out to typically 24 stories or higher and all those flats will be served by traditional bin lorry collection just seems to me baffling.

Navin Shah AM: What about benefits in terms of overall accessibility as well as public transport sustainable aspects, and energy efficiency of buildings?

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): All of those, everything comes in to play. All those things like combined heating power systems which are a very good way to power and heat developments,

better public transport, car clubs, everything comes in to play at higher density. On paper that is one of the real upsides.

Colin Wilson (Senior Manager, Planning Decisions, GLA): One of the things that we hope to commission research on later this year, we have not got the funding yet, is actually looking at some environmental impacts of high-rise versus streets. I think there are some interesting issues about the type of materials that are used. Clearly you are using enormous quantities of concrete which is less environmentally friendly for the big high-rise.

We are also interested. We do not have facts on this, in the lifespan of buildings which is clearly a big impact on overall sustainability. There is some anecdotal evidence, and I do not pretend it is more than that so I am not speaking with confidence here, but speaking to a whole range of quantity surveyors when they are doing lifetime costings for more modest buildings versus much bigger buildings, they typically assume a much longer lifespan for much more modest buildings; and they regard them as things that are probably more easily recycled in to other uses. I am not saying they are right, but it is an interesting issue that we want to find out more about but I do not think there is published information on it. If anybody listening knows of any please do send it through.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): OK, any other comments?

Colin Wilson (Senior Manager, Planning Decisions, GLA): Certainly, on the waste collection issue for Vauxhall Nine Elms, one of the things that we looked at was whether you could adopt a somewhat impact type system which they have in Sweden, although that has its downsides to. You end up having to collect from a centralised point anyway, so you just centralise the waste on the site. Yes, it is something else that needs to be dealt with on a high-density development. We certainly have looked at other countries and how they do it, and is it possible to do that here in the opportunity areas and with very dense developments?

In terms of sustainability, probably one of the biggest things that we have noticed from visiting high-density schemes is that the thermal performance in terms of heat insulation has just changed out of all recognition. One of the things which is common to lots of high-density development, and I am not saying it would not be common to terraced housing either, is that people very rarely need to use heating except in the very coldest months. This is just all new build so it would not necessarily be flats. It is a pretty fundamental change (over-speaking) is working in London. That is a building regulations requirement.

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): I think Nick Raynsford [MP for Greenwich and Woolwich] is going around at the moment saying he has just got through the entire winter without turning his heating on.

Richard Lavington (Maccleanor Lavington Architects): That is exactly the point I was about to make. I have to confess I lived in a modest high-rise in Geneva. We were right on top. Everyone below us was super heating their flats. We did not turn on the central heating all winter and then at the end discovered we had paid our equal share of (inaudible) they were furious.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): The last comment.

Navin Shah AM: I want to, please, go back to these issues about opportunity areas where we have been quite rightly focusing on density for housing, but obviously they play a much wider role, you talk about economic growth and so on. Am I right in saying that for opportunity areas one would automatically be looking at super or hyper density?

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): I do not think that is the general strategy, is it? Something like Barking Riverside and quite a bit of the Royal Docks so I do not believe they are naturally defaulting to very, very high density.

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): I think it depends on the public PTAL level. So somewhere like Vauxhall Nine Elms there is a new extension to the northern line going in so the PTAL will become very high. It is a relatively central location. That allows the densities to become very high. If you look at the Royal Docks you have got a fairly good level of PTAL but it is not as high, however it will improve with Crossrail. You have constraints on heights from the City Airport, so that is one of the things that constraints the Royal Docks. Other bits of London you have constraints on heights imposed by viewing corridors or context, such as conservation areas. Generally opportunity areas do not have that and somewhere like Barking Riverside, the constraint is public transport.

Navin Shah AM: What about some suburban areas which may not have such constraints? Will not opportunity areas have land values which have soared given the designation and given what government form? Also, one argument is by having much higher densities in opportunity areas, town centres etc, you are probably reducing pressure on the other brown fill sites within the borough? That is another argument I have come across.

Steve O'Connell AM (Deputy Chair): That is a very strong argument. I state my hand, Croydon is an opportunity area framework and as an administration we welcome that. One of the ways we welcome it publicly is it takes pressure off other parts of the borough, for the high-density and that sort of element. That strengthens that --

Navin Shah AM: The same as I have from my experience of Harrow itself. There is the thinking, the question is going back to the whole issue what does going high mean in terms of what you are trying to achieve to the local aspirations?

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): We did a study for Croydon a few years ago on housing capacity. It was trying to look at the implications for Croydon. It identified 50% of its housing growth to the metropolitan centre of the borough, which necessarily means that that needs to be relatively high-rise, certainly high-density. Actually, there is context in central Croydon where that is acceptable because in a way, it is full of tall buildings already.

We got the impression that there are unintended consequences because that actually means that a proportion of family housing also needs to go in to the town centre. Actually if you look at the private market, there is no market for that family housing in the town centre. You do not have to walk very far out of the town centre to find houses that you cannot build at high-rise and compete with. That is why not so many schemes have come forward and a lot stalled when the market crashed. In the longer term that will probably change in a way. Croydon has, for outer London, a very high level of public transport accessibility. A lot of services within the locality (over-speaking)

Steve O'Connell AM (Deputy Chair): That is why it is identified as an opportunity area.

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): It is a great opportunity. There are very few people living there at the moment, so much of it is political objection to higher-density development as there might be in more suburban areas (over-speaking)

Steve O'Connell AM (Deputy Chair): Without taking too long, one of the attractions is that you have a town centre where no one lives and you have social issues springing from that because there is no ownership of

the town centre. To positively inhabit a town centre with decent density, with decent quality, is a good aspiration for social reasons as well.

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): No, it is definitely a very good aspiration, yes.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): What about the families, Steve?

Steve O'Connell AM (Deputy Chair): Yes, but that is just the difficulty, you see, because I said right at the beginning there are only so many people who are one person business people who want one flat to go down to East Croydon Street and zoom in to the city. There are a certain number of those people and they will be catered for. We have got to be conscious of the other people, the families, who also want to inhabit the town centre, and own it and live in it.

Nicholas Boys Smith (Director, Create Streets): You will not be surprised to hear me say, build a high-density Notting Hill style town centre where you can get in terraced houses with families in it. I think, if I remember rightly from what I have seen of the plans, it would be very hard to do that in some of the buildings that are currently being proposed.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Right, I think on that note now we have gathered an enormous amount of evidence I think for our response to the London Plan. I am just going to thank you very much for everything you have given us today and to thank everybody listening and thank all of you.