

**MAYOR OF LONDON**

**SMALL SITES ×  
SMALL BUILDERS**

**UNLOCKING LAND TO SUPPORT A MORE  
DIVERSE HOUSING SUPPLY**

**GOOD GROWTH BY DESIGN**



**A  
BUILT  
ENVIRONMENT**

**FOR  
ALL  
LONDONERS**



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# 1

## DEPUTY MAYOR'S FOREWORD

### TOM COPLEY

I am pleased to introduce this report, which clearly sets out the importance of small sites to delivering more homes across London. I'm also delighted that it underlines the benefits of the Mayor's successful 'Small Sites x Small Builders' programme which was launched in 2018.

Small sites have an important role to play in increasing London's housing supply and delivering against the Mayor's ambitious targets. It is estimated that as many as a quarter of London's homes could be delivered on small sites over the next ten years and, for boroughs without a supply of large sites, around half of their output will need to be delivered on small sites.

However, evidence suggests that the number of homes built on small sites has fluctuated over the last 10 years and there are a number of barriers to delivery. Complexities associated with delivering small sites mean that they are often overlooked in favour of bigger sites which offer more immediate potential to unlock homes in volume. Delivery on small sites has also been undermined by a prolonged period of contraction within the London and UK small builder sector.

Despite this, the significant untapped potential associated with small sites is widely recognised by public landowners and planning authorities. As a result, we are now seeing a renewed focus on the role of small sites in meeting housing demand, and public landowners are increasingly turning to their own small sites to deliver the homes they need.

The Small Sites x Small Builders programme has built a strong momentum and has been supporting public land owners to release land for housing more directly to the market. This has been an

important part of the programme's success, creating opportunities for smaller developers and builders to become engaged in the challenge of providing quality housing in London.

I hope you enjoy reading the report.

**Tom Copley, Deputy Mayor for Housing & Residential Development**

## 2

# MAYOR'S DESIGN ADVOCATE FOREWORD

## DAVID OGUNMUYIWA

Public land provides vital open space and recreational opportunities for Londoners. Yet, many of us know of underused urban space belonging to public landowners. Given London's urgent need for housing, this presents a real missed opportunity.

The Small Sites x Small Builders programme connects interested suppliers and landowners to boost housing delivery. However, we must make this process more viable. Historically, releasing small sites for homes has been challenging for many public landowners. It can seem more efficient for them to commit to fewer but bigger developments.

As such, we have to encourage smaller, more agile suppliers to deliver these opportunities (where public landowners find it hard). Additionally, these contribute to the economic capacity within communities. A win-win situation.

Architects know there are often small sites opportunities hidden in plain sight: next to things, over things, around things, behind things. Imaginative design responses can result in innovative, high quality, sustainable, policy-compliant homes. These can be positively integrated into established communities, helping make them more coherent, attractive and safer.

The Small Sites x Small Builders programme is intrinsically linked to the Mayor's Good Growth by Design Programme. Both aim to promote quality design and broaden authorship and participation in the production of our shared built environment. New London Plan Guidance (LPG) promotes those principles. The draft Small Site Design Codes LPG provides guidance to local authorities on how to produce area-wide design codes for small sites within their borough. These design codes aim to provide clarity and certainty to the type

of development that is permitted on small sites. The Mayor will also be publishing a revised Housing Design Standards LPG for London.

It's important to remember that small developments on inflexible small sites are often highly constrained. As such, they can demand as much intricate handling as some larger new build developments. The Small Site Design Codes LPG reiterates the need to integrate development positively into surrounding contexts, communities and public realms.

This approach to good growth champions the idea that limited resources, scarce space and quality design are not mutually exclusive. When balanced carefully and imaginatively, these can all contribute to delivering homes on small sites.

**David Ogunmuyiwa, Mayor's Design Advocate**



### 3

## REPORT STRUCTURE AND SUMMARY

This report explores the small sites opportunity for London, and the barriers to delivery which must be overcome to realise this.

The research in this report will support all those involved in small sites delivery. This includes public and private landowners, policymakers, small builders and developers, and built environment professionals.

It brings together learning from the Mayor's Small Sites x Small Builders programme, with best practice case studies. It provides recommendations for those involved in small sites delivery across London on how to adapt their approaches to maximise success. This should be measured in the growth of quality housing that better suits the needs of residents and communities and a more diverse range of builders in the sector.

## 4 THE DELIVERY OPPORTUNITY

The potential of small sites is gaining greater recognition in policy. The London Plan sets ambitious housing targets for the city and recognises that greater density is required to meet these. The London Plan has a target for an average of 52,000 new homes to be delivered every year to 2029. The affordability, quality and design of these homes is integral to the Mayor's vision of Good Growth. Each of these factors will help ensure that London remains a mixed and inclusive place where everyone has a choice about where to live.

Small sites are key to delivering against these requirements for London's future supply of housing, potentially accounting for nearly a quarter of future housing supply across London.

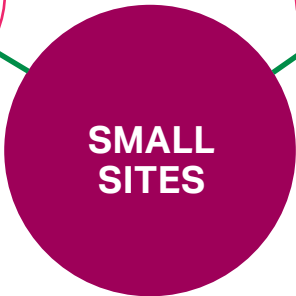
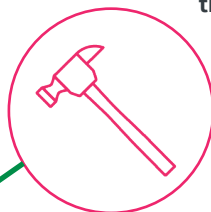
It is also now widely acknowledged that the benefits of building homes on small sites go beyond the delivery of homes. Small sites can be used to stimulate the small builder market, providing opportunity to smaller enterprises, self-builders, and community-led builders. On publicly owned small sites, there can be greater control over how the land is used in order to realise broader strategic benefits. The Mayor's Small Sites x Small Builders programme has shown how public sector intervention can be used to accelerate delivery of improved outcomes.

**There are three key areas of opportunity for small sites:**

**A. Delivering  
Homes**



**B. Supporting  
the Small Builder  
Market**



**C. Driving  
Innovation &  
Public Value**

## A. Delivering Homes

The London Plan small sites policy recognises the strategic importance of small sites to London. A ten-year target of just over 119,000 has been set for delivering homes on small sites; this accounts for nearly a quarter of London's total housing delivery target. Small sites supply will come via a number of delivery routes: since 2008, around 56% of small site units have come via new build development, around 27% through change of use and around 15% through conversions<sup>1</sup>.

### Delivering affordable homes

The need for more affordable housing in London, across a range of models, is more pressing than ever. Boosting the supply of housing on publicly owned small sites will allow more influence over affordability and tenure. This is a big opportunity to leverage small sites to meet wider strategic objectives, such as diversifying the housing types available. Through the Small Sites x Small Builders programme public landowners can make use of lease agreements to ensure specific tenure types (including affordable housing) are preserved in perpetuity.

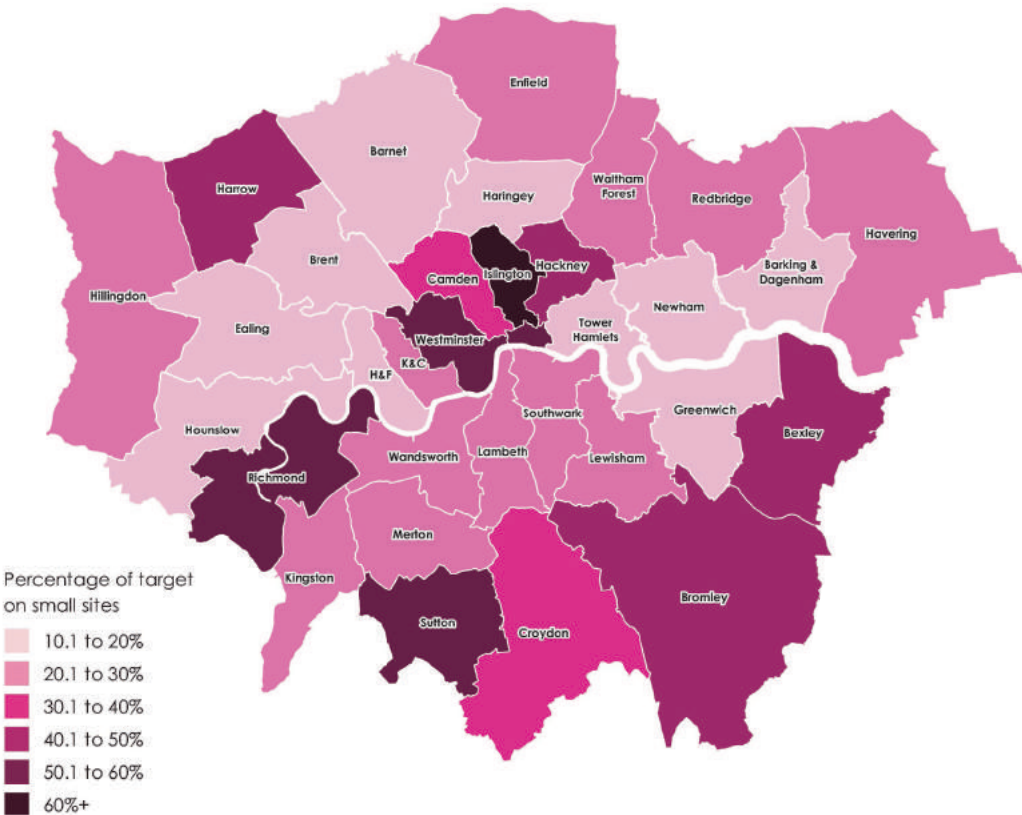
### Diversifying housing supply

Recently, there has been a focus on the need to encourage more community-led housing. Small sites are key to the growth and progression of these types of enterprise. Through targeted small sites programmes including the Mayor's Small Sites x Small Builders, local authorities can restrict sites for certain groups, such as community-led groups or self-builders. This can provide opportunities that are unlikely to exist in the open market. As public landowners can maintain more oversight of their delivery, there is also an opportunity to provide better support to these groups. This can be fundamental in supporting their growth and engagement in delivering homes.

1 The London Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment 2017, GLA

### Small Sites Housing Targets for the Decade Ahead

London has a target of 119,250 homes to be delivered on small sites over the next ten years. This amounts to around 23 per cent of the total housing target for that period.



Borough	Small Sites Target	% of all
Barking	1,990	10.2%
Barnet	4,320	18.4%
Bexley	3,050	44.5%
Brent	4,330	18.6%
Bromley	3,790	49.0%
Camden	3,280	31.6%
City of London	740	50.7%
Croydon	6,410	30.8%
Ealing	4,240	19.7%
Enfield	3,530	28.3%
Greenwich	3,010	10.7%
Hackney	6,580	49.5%
Hammer's & Fulham	2,590	16.1%
Haringey	2,600	16.3%
Harlow	3,750	46.8%
Havering	3,140	24.4%

Borough	Small Sites Target	% of all
Hillingdon	2,950	27.2%
Hounslow	2,800	15.7%
Islington	4,840	62.5%
Kensington	1,290	28.8%
Kingston	2,250	23.3%
Lambeth	4,000	30.0%
Lewisham	3,790	22.7%
Merton	2,610	28.4%
Newham	3,800	11.6%
Redbridge	3,680	26.1%
Richmond	2,340	56.9%
Southwark	6,010	25.5%
Sutton	2,680	57.1%
Tower Hamlets	5,280	15.2%
Waltham Forest	3,590	28.4%
Wandsworth	4,140	21.2%
Westminster	5,040	51.2%

Source: London Plan 2021



## **B. Supporting The Small Builder Market**

At their peak in the 1980s, small builders accounted for nearly half of all housing delivery in the UK. Today they account for just 12 per cent. More than half of all new homes in the UK are now built by the eight largest housing builders<sup>2</sup>.

There is critical need, however, to sustain an active small builder sector. This is vital in respect of the delivery of small sites, as it encourages more competition and innovation. It is also significant for the builders themselves, as it promotes new and improved opportunities for training, employment, and wealth creation.

### **Delivering homes, fast**

Small builders can be better placed to develop smaller sites that are unattractive to large enterprises because they are able to take a more bespoke approach to the sites. They are also often able to move more quickly and with more flexibility to bring a development forward. Working with smaller builders provides significant opportunity to work faster and more creatively to unlock delivery options that may otherwise be overlooked.

### **Supporting competition in the market**

Making smaller sites available can create the opportunity that small builders need to engage in the delivery of housing. This can lead to a significant increase in the number of additional homes being built.

### **Building capacity in the market**

Today, working with small builders is key to the Covid-19 recovery as it helps to avoid further job losses and supports financial resilience. In the longer term, these opportunities will help small builders to gain expertise, build capacity and grow. This will create a healthier level of competition in the homebuilding market and could lead to better outcomes.

2. NHBC, Small house builders and developers: Current challenges to growth, 2017

## **C. Driving Innovation and Unlocking Public Value**

There has been an increased focus on inclusive approaches to growth in London in recent years as captured in the Mayor's Good Growth programme. These themes are currently being re-emphasised across London as part of the economic fallout from Covid-19, the renewed debate on racial injustice and addressing the climate emergency. This has put more focus on the public sector's role in showing leadership through its own assets, levers, and investments.

### **Building more inclusive communities and economies**

Small sites provide opportunities for public sector landowners to show leadership. It is a chance to better balance financial, social, and environmental considerations to encourage new approaches and typologies on their own land. An important part of this is support for local enterprise and creating pathways to encourage more equal and representative participation. The forthcoming Mayor's Architecture + Urbanism Framework in summer 2022 will address the under-representation of women and people from minority groups in public procurement processes and promote equality of opportunity in accessing public sector work. This will include broadening the range of suppliers and will contain a dedicated Small Sites Lot from which to select design teams.

Restrictions around bidder type, size or location can be put in place to ensure that programmes are supporting broader objectives. For example, this includes working with specific delivery partners like community-led housing groups or minority-led enterprises. Small sites can also provide specific types of homes that the market is unable or unwilling to provide. Public landowners can focus attention on small sites to drive delivery of specific types of housing through targeted intervention and explicit support which could include marketing the sites to appropriate providers, for example, disabled access homes, or 100% social housing.

### **Modern methods of construction (MMC) and sustainability**

Small sites also offer potential to support fresh construction approaches and housing typologies.

Both the London Plan and MHCLG's 'Planning for the Future' cite the need to encourage more innovation in housing delivery. This includes support for modern methods of construction, and approaches which support the response to the climate emergency.

To date, 28 London boroughs have declared a climate emergency. There is a clear and urgent need to address climate change and reduce emissions. Given this, small sites provide a valuable opportunity for public landowners to test and drive the use of MMC and sustainable practices to deliver their sites. These priorities are supported through the London Plan policies on whole life-cycle carbon and the circular economy.

## 5 THE DELIVERY CHALLENGE

Despite the opportunity, there are significant and long-standing challenges which are constraining the supply of homes on small sites across London.

How the sector and market respond to these challenges will help determine the direction of housing supply in London over the coming years.

### **Where are we now? Small sites delivery over the past decade**

The London Plan set a target of nearly 12,000 new homes on small sites per year over the next decade. Applying past delivery rates<sup>3</sup>, it can be assumed that approximately 6,700 of this supply will relate to new build delivery (56%), with the remaining coming from change of use (27%) and conversions (15%).

The past decade (up to the end of 2018) has seen around 21,200 small sites delivered on, accommodating around 59,000 new build homes. This equates to an average of around 5,900 new build homes on small sites per year, with an average of around 2.8 new build homes per small site.

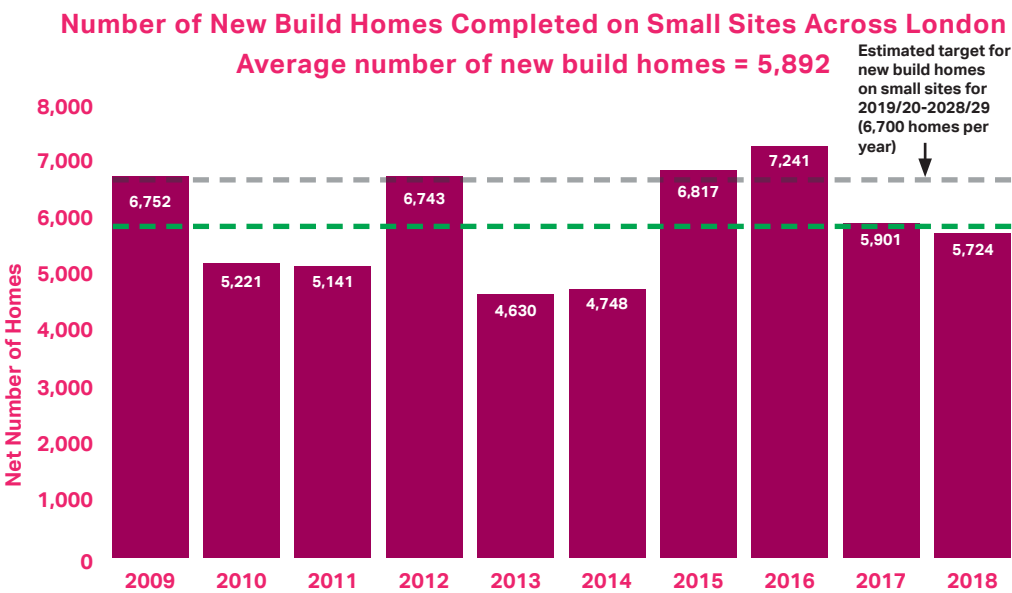
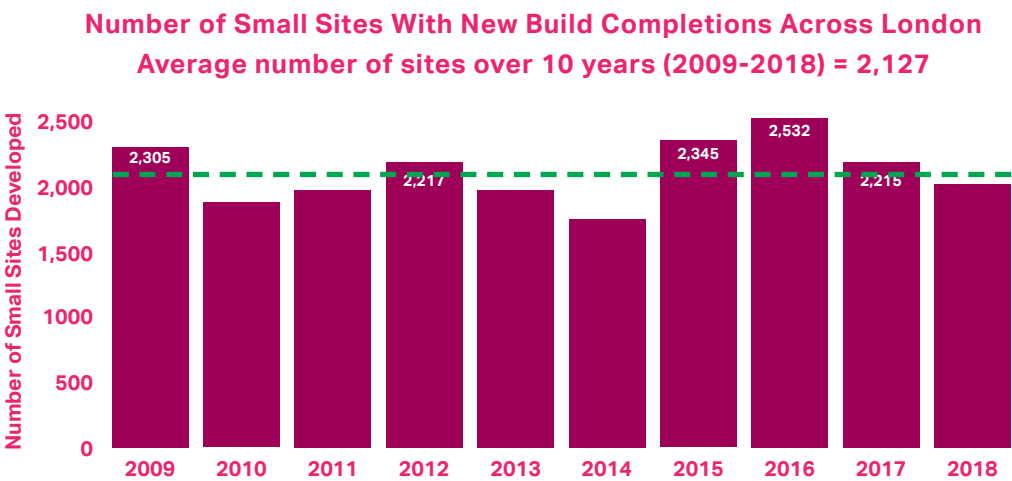
Based on past delivery rates, around 800 more new build homes are needed on small sites each year to meet the targets set out in the London Plan. Taking the average of 2.8 new build homes per small site, this would equate to an additional 286 small sites which need to be developed on each year.

These sites must overcome the challenges and complexities currently constraining supply if they are to help meet London's housing needs delivery performance.

3. Evidence in the 2017 London SHLAA highlights that around 56% of homes delivered on small sites since 2008 have been new builds

## New Build Small Site Completions Across London Over the Last Decade

The annual rate of small sites developed on across London has fluctuated over the past decade, with no obvious increase.



Source: London Development Database

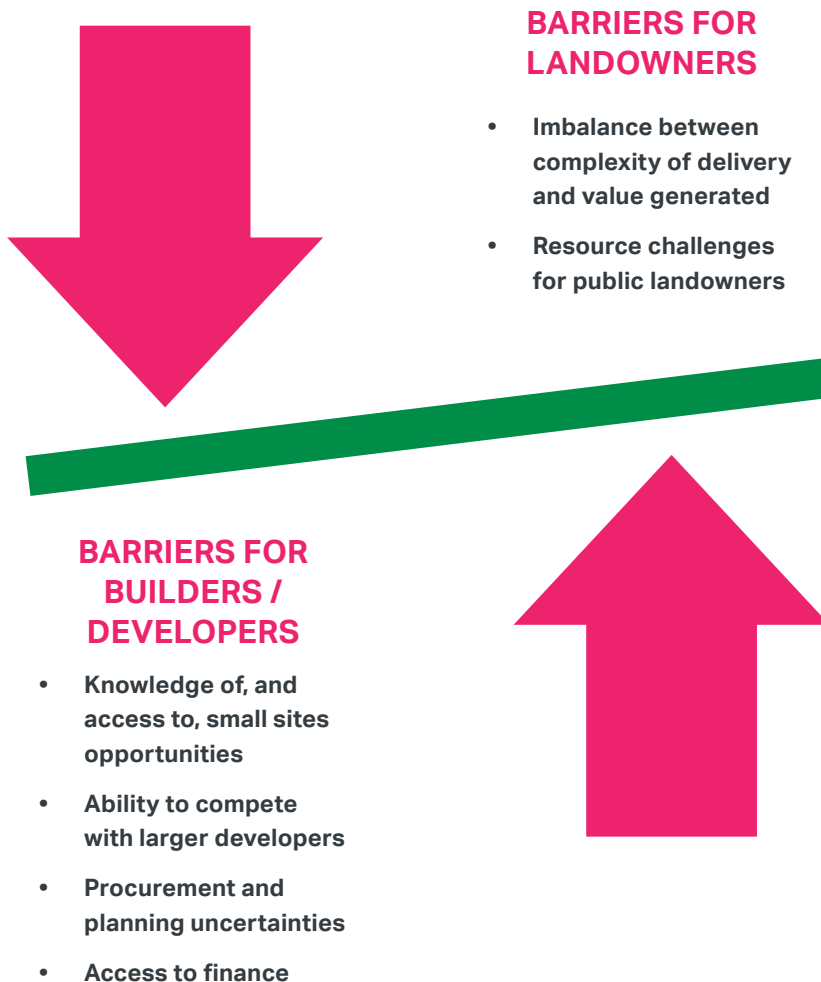
## The Distribution of New Build Small Sites Delivery Across London

The distribution of small sites delivery across London's boroughs is diverse. The number of new build units on small sites ranges from 500 to 4,800 over the past decade. In terms of total housing delivery figures, this ranges from 15% to nearly 50%.

## The Challenges Faced in Delivering Small Sites

Sustaining and increasing levels of delivery on small sites will play a crucial role in meeting the London Plan's housing supply targets.

However, to do so, several well acknowledged delivery challenges must be overcome. These relate both to small site landowners and builders and developers involved in the delivery of housing on small sites.



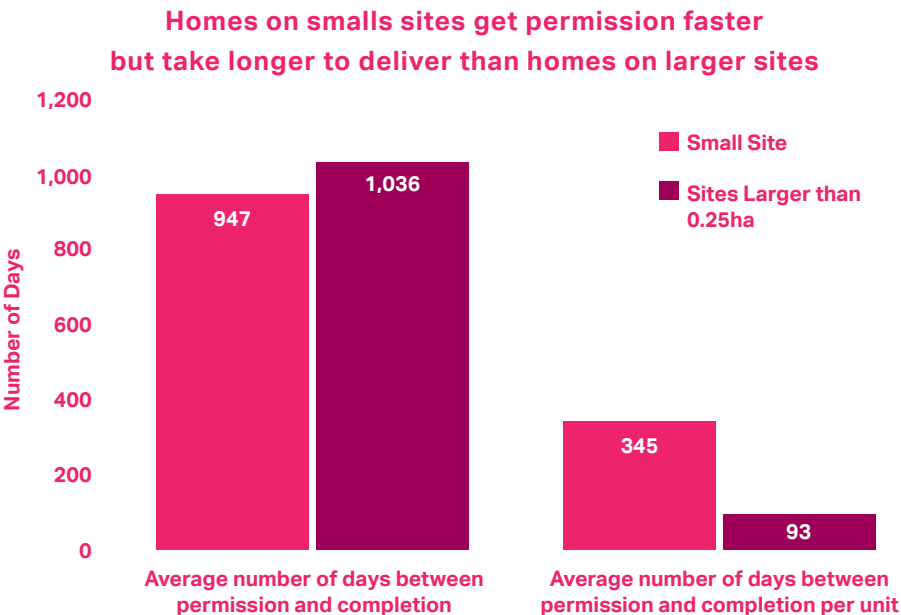
**Delivery barriers facing landowners**

The key challenges facing landowners in relation to small sites include their capacity to accommodate homes, and their comparative complexity to deliver.

Over the past decade the average small site has delivered around 2.8 homes. These homes have on average taken more than three times longer to move from planning approval to completion than the average larger site home. This creates an imbalance between the resource involved in delivery, and the ultimate value in bringing small sites forward.

The challenge is greatest for public landowners tasked with delivering against ambitious housing targets, but who may lack the resources to do so.

The resource challenge is arguably now more pressing than ever before. The cost of Covid-19 and a decade of reductions in budgets, means that public sector finances are sorely stretched. This means that sites that are proportionally more resource intensive to deliver are less attractive to bring forward.



Source: London Development Database

## Delivery barriers facing builders

The comparative complexity of delivering on small sites also acts as a barrier for larger builders and developers. Partly for these reasons, small builders have historically played an important role in small sites delivery. As such, they have filled the gap in the market left by larger builders who usually focus on larger scale and longer-term housebuilding projects.

Macro-economic context aside, common barriers facing small builders include:

- Lack of knowledge of small sites opportunities and lack of a clear pipeline of small sites for development
- Planning uncertainty deterring activity on complex sites. Recent research<sup>4</sup> shows that the average small sites planning application takes well over a year.
- Limited ability to secure finance.

Public sector land provides a strong potential route to market for small builders. However, there are several additional factors which have typically constrained participation in such opportunities:

- On the demand side, public sector authorities have long used panel or framework approaches which are often dominated by larger contractors.
- On the supply side, there is a lack of knowledge among small builders of the opportunities which exist. Many also have negative perceptions around the administrative or bureaucratic challenges in dealing with the public sector (including procurement).

There is a clear, and growing, appetite among public sector authorities to work with smaller and more 'local' enterprises. This context and the economic situation means it is vital that small builders have the support they need to actively engage with small sites developments.

<sup>4</sup> Small Sites: Unlocking Housing Delivery, Lichfields, 2020: [small-sites-unlocking-housing-delivery\\_sep-2020.pdf](#) (lichfields.uk)



## 6

# LEARNING FROM ACTION

London's small sites are of strategic importance. The GLA has been piloting new approaches to help both public landowners and small builders to engage with the opportunity and overcome delivery barriers. The GLA's 'Small Sites x Small Builder' programme has delivered learning and guidance for public landowners to unlock small sites across the city.

### **The Mayor's Small Sites x Small Builders Programme**

This programme was launched in 2018 to encourage public landowners to bring forward small or complex sites for housing-led development. It recognises that these often overlooked sites are a key part of meeting London's housing demand.

Funded by the London Economic Action Partnership (LEAP)<sup>5</sup> and the Mayor, it offers financial and strategic support to public landowners to 'unlock' sites for delivery. Through the programme's online portal, these sites are made accessible to small developers and builders. The contracting processes are also streamlined. This included addressing due diligence up front and introducing standardised contracts to improve the disposal process for both parties.

#### **Key Lessons at a Glance**

- Adequate staff capacity upfront to commission site identification work and due diligence is key to the successful execution of a small sites programme.
- Ensuring in-house skills and expertise are available can drive positive outcomes by enabling greater collaborative working with small builders.
- Coordination and communication between planning policy and Housing Teams is key to efficient delivery of small sites.

<sup>5</sup> <https://lep.london/>

The programme was set up in response to a shortage of small sites available and being actively developed for housing. It also helps address the significant fall in the number of small builders operating in the UK.

### **Small Sites x Small Builders: Key Successes to May 2022**

- 60 sites across 19 different boroughs have been brought to market via the programme to date, with more due in the coming years.
- Over 80% of public landowners said that they would not have progressed their small sites at the same rate without the programme.
- 1,800+ small builders registered with the programme.
- 85% of small builders engaged employed less than 10 people.
- A majority of both public landowners and small builders engaged with the programme said they found it extremely valuable.

We have carried out an in-depth evaluation of the programme and consulted both public landowners and small developers. As a result, we have identified several key principles that will support public landowners bringing their own small sites forward more effectively:

- A. The importance of finding the right sites
- B. Carrying out thorough due diligence
- C. Effective site marketing
- D. A collaborative approach to delivery
- E. Providing support and guidance to the market response

## **A. Finding the Right Sites**

Finding small sites that can adequately accommodate high quality, liveable homes can be challenging. To establish a strong supply of sites, requires a thorough site identification process and a strong understanding of the funding needed for each site.

### **Early understanding of the funding requirement**

Unlocking small sites can be proportionately more complex and costly than their larger counterparts. Comprehensive site identification and a due diligence framework can help to reduce these costs.

Significant upfront investment is often needed to unlock these sites. Acknowledging this and building a detailed funding strategy at the start of any small sites programme should be a priority. To ensure value for money, any upfront investment needed for remediation works (decontamination; demolition; utilities and services) should be balanced with the site's potential.

Alongside this, it is important to acknowledge the need for adequate staffing resource. There must also be funding in place across all project stages.

### **Ensuring suitability of land**

It is vital to understand what makes a small site the 'right site'. This will reduce the cost burden on councils, whilst maximising the chances of successful delivery. That way landowners can avoid spending valuable time and resource on sites that may hold an unacceptable planning risk or be unsuitable for housing.

A set of assessment criteria includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- **Size and site layout**

Ensure the site size and layout is suitable for housing development and the investment needed is not disproportionate to the value generated.

- **Surrounding uses**

Understanding if housing would be appropriate in the locality, thinking specifically about surrounding land uses.

- **Easements/ rights of ways/ leases**

A thorough understanding of any leases, rights of way or easements that exist is crucial to any scheme. Grasping these issues upfront can reduce costs and delays.

- **Daylight/ sunlight/ overshadowing**

Accounting for the site's proximity to other developments and the potential risk held regarding daylight/ sunlight obstruction.

## **B. Due Diligence**

Thorough due diligence in the early stages of site identification can help create confidence in the small builder market. It can also reduce unforeseen costs during the site development process.

### **Addressing site information barriers to the small builder market**

Thorough due diligence can reduce perceived and actual risk, and, in doing so encourage smaller or less financially robust enterprises to participate in the delivery of small sites. Small builders viewed having access to site information and reports at the bid stage as critical in undertaking financial research. This helps to reduce perceived risk and provide certainty around the amount of money available for the purchase of the land.

### **Managing planning risk**

Both public landowners and small builders saw planning risk as one of the biggest barriers to delivering homes on small sites. This was evident during the Mayor's Small Sites x Small Builders consultation. A comprehensive due diligence process can highlight key planning risks and give the developer a chance to address these risks early on. Early-stage recognition and mitigation are critical for reducing risks and enhancing positive outcomes and can significantly reduce borough expenditure. Small sites are often located in close proximity to existing homes and other users. The importance of consulting these stakeholders can help build relationships with the community prior to planning to avoid objections and to minimise disruption during construction.

## **C. Marketing Small Sites**

Effective marketing of sites is key to finding the right delivery partner. Ensuring that opportunities are communicated to the market in a transparent and accessible way can also support smaller enterprises to bid.

### **Stimulate the small developer and small builder market**

Despite wanting to engage with small sites, many smaller enterprises reported that they found it difficult to find opportunities with public landowners.

A single platform or portal to market the sites alongside clear bid guidance outlining expectations can give new entrants confidence.

### **Create an opportunity for learning**

A transparent bidding process with a clear bidding qualification and assessment criteria is key. This can remove barriers to smaller or less experienced organisations.

A clear bid feedback process is also important. Feedback on unsuccessful bids can provide direction for future bids and enable continued engagement and learning.

### **Reduce pressure on local authority resource**

Providing an online system for submitting bids and easily accessible FAQ support should be a priority for public landowners in London. This is particularly important given that resource remains a challenge for delivering small sites.

## **D. A Collaborative Approach**

Collaboration - both within public bodies and with external parties - is key to the success of small sites programmes. This is vital given the complexities that exist in unlocking small sites. Ensuring early communication with planning departments can significantly de-risk site delivery. At the same time, working cross-departmentally can help to align the programme with broader strategic goals to ensure better outcomes.

### **A supportive planning environment**

Planning risk is a huge barrier to small sites delivery, given the often complex nature of sites, atypical locations or site typologies. Upfront liaison with planning departments and continuous collaboration on sites is needed to reduce this risk.

The Small Sites Design Codes LPG encourages boroughs to use design codes to promote and encourage the development of underutilised small sites. This guidance should be accounted for when creating a small sites framework and can help to reduce planning risk.

### **Creating a shared purpose**

Developing specific policies or frameworks for small sites programmes can help to establish buy-in across teams and departments early on. This can create valuable momentum and reduce friction and delays as the programme progresses. Cross-departmental small sites steering groups are a way to focus attention and drive activity.

### **A collaborative approach**

The ambiguous planning context of many small sites means that there is often a substantial planning risk. One way to lessen this is to understand what the 'right sites' are in planning terms. Working with planning colleagues to define a framework to assess sites can substantially reduce this risk and improve outcomes.

## **E. Support and Guidance for the Market Response**

It should be recognised early on that smaller builders may need extra support and guidance. Providing this support can strengthen the small builder market and improve outcomes.

### **Building confidence and capacity among new entrants**

Small sites offer a chance to work with community-led housing groups, self-builders and other younger or less experienced organisations. Providing access to support and guidance is key and can improve outcomes. It is important to recognise this early in the process to ensure that the skills and capacity are available to provide this support.

### **Simplify the contracting process**

Onerous, complex and expensive procurement processes are often cited as a key barrier for small developers and builders wanting to develop public land. Introducing simplified and standard form contracts for small sites can help encourage a broader market response.

## 7 INNOVATION AND BEST PRACTICE

Here we explore how public landowners across London have engaged with their small sites. We examine how public small sites programmes can accelerate delivery of homes and support broader strategic priorities and policy goals.

These case studies look to learn from best practice and understand where resource can best be deployed. Additionally, they explore how public landowners have tailored their programmes to meet their contextual needs.

The case studies have been split into the following three broad categories:

- A. Leveraging small sites to **champion community-led housing**
- B. Working with small sites to **drive affordable housing provision**
- C. Using small sites to **incentivise innovation** in housing delivery

The international case studies presented in this section look at how the public sector has enabled community-led and self-build housing. The legislative, funding, governance and planning contexts vary across these projects. Some of the mechanisms that have been put in place to deliver new homes on small sites in these examples would be challenging to achieve in London. However, they highlight the important role that a pro-active public sector can play in coordinating and bringing forward small sites for the delivery of affordable homes.

## **A. Leveraging Small Sites to Champion Community-Led Housing**

Community-led housing allows people to play a leading and lasting role in the creation of their own homes.

Approaches can include (but are not limited to):

- Community land trusts
- Housing co-ops
- Cohousing or collective self-build

There is growing interest and support in community-led housing both nationally and in the London Housing Strategy and the London Plan. Local authorities across London are also increasingly looking to champion community-led housing to diversify the way new homes are delivered.

Alongside the direct benefits of providing much needed permanent affordable housing, supporting community-led housing has many other benefits. This includes empowering communities and building stronger neighbourhoods, mobilising support for larger scale regeneration and providing skills, training, and jobs to local people. Increasingly, small sites are viewed as key giving community-led housing groups the opportunities they need to engage with the delivery of homes.

This section of the report looks at how Hackney and Tower Hamlets councils mobilised their small sites to support community-led housing groups.

## **London Borough of Hackney**

### **Using small sites to pilot new approaches to working with community-led developers**

In 2018, Hackney committed to “encourage housing innovation, including cooperative and self-build ideas where this can support the delivery of a blend of housing tenures and types that meet Hackney residents’ needs”. This put small sites – and using these to provide new types of builder and developer opportunities – central to their housing strategy. Getting early buy-in from across the organisation was key to the successful launch of the self-build challenge.

The Self-Build Challenge invited individuals and families in Hackney to put forward an innovative and environmentally friendly home design. A pre-designated site was chosen close to Hackney Central, which was too small for council-led schemes. The site was offered with a share of freehold arrangement. The council will retain ownership of a percentage equivalent to the land value once the home is built. This means the self-builder does not have to pay for the land. Crucially, it also means that future residents can also enjoy this benefit when they leave. The opportunity was publicised by the council and through the GLA Small Sites x Small Builders portal.

The Self-Build Challenge brings together the need to explore all housing options while encouraging innovation. The council is piloting the approach, allowing them to:

- first test Hackney residents’ appetite for self-build schemes
- make use of land that is currently boarded up and abandoned
- build the skills and capacity within the council that will allow them to roll the scheme out further.

The project rollout recognises the need for in-house skill, knowledge and capacity. Hackney has used their small sites to test new ideas and adapt and upskill within the council. These lessons will build capacity and knowledge for residents and council officers alike. In future, these learnings can be transferred to other small sites, or even larger sites.

## **London Borough of Tower Hamlets**

### **Using a small sites programme to activate ambitions of working with community-led housing providers**

Funding, input and staff knowledge from the Mayor's Small Sites x Small Builders programme and the Mayor's Community Led Housing London hub<sup>6</sup> have been key. This has helped to unlock small sites in Tower Hamlets and upskilled the in-house team. It has also contributed to the development of site-specific guidance around small sites and community-led housing. This has helped build momentum for the programme and ensured the right support is in place for community-led groups the borough is working with.

In 2018, Tower Hamlets commissioned a study of its small sites. This looked at where the opportunities were, how many homes could be delivered and potential opportunities to work with community-led housing groups. The Affordable Self-Build Programme was developed after the Mayor of Tower Hamlets pledged to support self-builders. Officers established a Self-Build Forum for groups and individuals on the self-build register. After dialogue with self-builders the council has put sites on the Small Sites portal. The aim is to bring forward sites for community-led self-build, with knowledge of the available small sites with development potential in the borough.

The borough has introduced several approaches to ensure their objectives will be met when releasing their small sites. There is a requirement for a significant level of affordability. Proposals for delivering homes at London Affordable Rent level or aligning with average household incomes will be scored higher. There are also clauses in the Section 106 and leasehold covenants to ensure any affordability is protected for the long-term. Bids are scored 20 per cent on the financial offer / 80 per cent on qualitative aspects (including community benefit and scheme sustainability). By so doing, Tower Hamlets has shown their intention to accommodate proposals that meet residents' needs and which may not be viable otherwise.

6 [www.communityledhousing.london/support/boroughs](http://www.communityledhousing.london/support/boroughs)

## Inspiration from Elsewhere: Delivering Housing Through Community-Led Housing

### Baugruppen, across Germany: Working with co-ops and self-builders

The concept of Baugruppen (translating as 'building group') is well established in Germany. It is a model of housing that draws together a group of people and allows them to act as their own developer in a multi-unit housing project. The concept is popular in cities across Germany including Berlin. There, around 500 Baugruppen projects have been delivered over the past 15 years. Reflecting the needs and aspirations of prospective residents, projects often focus on affordability and high-quality design. While the approach varies from city to city, it is common for public authorities to give priority to Baugruppen over commercial developers. In Berlin, around 30 per cent of public land is reserved for this approach. In other cities, fixed price approaches have been used to avoid a commercial bidding war.



BIGyard Zelterstraße 5 by Zanderroth Architekten, Baugruppen, Germany, image credit Unit 15, London Metropolitan University

## Inspiration from Elsewhere: Delivering Housing Through Community-Led Housing

### **Almere, Netherlands: Providing opportunity to self-builders with publicly owned land**

Almere New Town shows how publicly owned land can be used to increase competition in the housebuilding market. At the same time, this can encourage greater affordability and sustainability in the housing offer. This new housing development was built on publicly owned land and masterplanned by the council. The masterplan responded to different demographics, ensuring that the final offer would meet the local housing need, including demand for group projects.

The council installed the infrastructure and services, before selling each plot at a fixed m2 rate to local self-builders. A series of parameters outlining building heights, styles and materials were applied to the plots. Within these, self-builders could exercise their creativity and choice. The project has been widely recognised for successfully delivering adaptable and diverse homes, whilst stimulating the local economy.



Almere, Netherlands, image credit Unit 15, London Metropolitan University

## **B. Public Landowner-Led Approaches to Maximise the Supply of Affordable Homes**

For London to deliver the housing it needs, increasing the rate of housing delivery from small sites is a strategic priority. There is much untapped potential across London in publicly owned small sites. Today, these are increasingly being turned to by local authorities to deliver homes.

This section looks at how public landowners can unlock small sites, using tailored small sites programmes to maximise the supply of affordable housing.

We use examples from Barnet, Hounslow, Lewisham and Greenwich councils. All three have activated their small sites to deliver against core strategic priorities.

## **London Borough of Barnet**

### **Unlocking small sites to deliver affordable housing**

Barnet Council has put small sites at the heart of its housing programme. The council view them as an important way of meeting housing demand, whilst maintaining oversight over the type of housing delivered. Their small sites programme has allowed them to think more strategically about how to leverage small sites to bring broader benefits to the community. The provision of affordable homes is the centre of the approach. Focusing on small sites has allowed them to:

- Provide homes for wheelchair users by requiring the schemes to be low-rise
- Reduce anti-social behaviour by developing underused back-land sites
- Take charge of the whole process, from design to planning and delivery. This meant that surrounding residents could go to them with any issues during the development process.

Through the tender process, the council has made strong links to smaller companies they may not otherwise have had an opportunity to work with. When working with smaller or inexperienced enterprises support from the council has been needed. This has been vital for negotiating planning conditions and producing the necessary paperwork to complete the projects. Early planning to ensure capacity to meet the needs of smaller contractors, on often complex sites, is key to progress.

The small sites programme has given the borough the opportunity to develop the experience and skills needed to bring small sites forward. They have used it as an opportunity to understand what residents want and test their approach to the planning process, procurement and delivery.

## **London Borough of Hounslow**

### **Working with registered providers to deliver affordable housing**

As part of the council's '5,000 Pledge', Hounslow has committed to secure new affordable housing in the borough. To deliver on their targets, Hounslow is focusing on unlocking small sites.

Hounslow has restricted the enterprises able to bid on small sites coming through their programme to Registered Providers. It has focused on the delivery of rented accommodation that can take nominations from the borough's housing register. By working solely with Registered Providers, they can take advantage of their experience in delivering and managing affordable housing. This can help build confidence around the ultimate benefits that will be gained from delivering on small sites.

Hounslow has focused on sites that have previously been overlooked as opportunities for housing. For example, they have worked with Registered Providers on several garage sites. Already, four planning applications have been submitted with further sites expected to come forward. The borough prefers to release sites in batches. This is an important way to achieve greater economies of scale. As such, it can reduce the costs associated with working with a high number of different Registered Providers down the line. Ensuring dedicated council resource is available to work with delivery partners is available has helped drive the programme forward. At the same time, a collaborative relationship with asset management and planning departments has enabled early buy-in. This has led to greater efficiencies later down the line.

Hounslow usually find a delivery partner from its list of registered providers with a proven track record of delivering homes in the borough. The council has been able to reach a wider audience through the Mayor's Small Sites x Small Builders marketing portal.

## **London Borough of Lewisham**

### **Working with registered providers to deliver affordable housing**

Lewisham's small site schemes have brought unused or underused land back to life. Many of these sites have delivered wider benefits for residents and businesses. This includes improvements to existing estates or public realm and their ability to use the small sites to work with local small businesses.

Lewisham places importance on finding the right delivery partner. On each site they seek to find an appropriately sized local contractor with a good pedigree of delivering similar projects. The borough's small sites programme has been a valuable opportunity for Lewisham to develop effective working relationships with small local builders. The smaller infill schemes are typically more attractive to these organisations. By being a large client, Lewisham can provide any guidance and support that may be needed in the development process.

Lewisham's small sites programme has been developed alongside the Mayor's Small Sites x Small Builders programme. This has influenced their objectives around both direct delivery of new housing schemes and their small sites policy guidance.

The council has created a draft document with Lewisham-specific guidance on the development of small sites. This guidance aims to push Lewisham's landowners, residents, and communities to develop where they haven't before. At the same time, it de-risks the planning process and celebrates Lewisham's character, while making space for new and affordable housing.

## **Royal Borough of Greenwich: Meridian Home Start (MHS)**

### **Working with registered providers to deliver affordable housing**

MHS is a community benefit society established by Greenwich Council. Its purpose is to develop and manage better quality and genuinely affordable private rental housing for Greenwich residents in lower income jobs. Average rents are set at 65 per cent of market value across MHS' new-build portfolio.

MHS is fully independent from Greenwich in terms of its governance. This enables the borough to deploy its Right to Buy receipts towards developing affordable housing via MHS.

However, a close and partnered ethos exists between the parties. Greenwich is the primary lender and the primary vendor of land to MHS, and a member of the borough's cabinet attends MHS Board meetings. As a community benefit society, MHS is also bound by its objectives to solely deliver benefits for Greenwich residents.

As such, MHS has been an important tool within RBG's toolkit for housing delivery. MHS is a small developer with an experienced board and executive team. This has enabled Greenwich to unlock and stimulate development on small and challenging sites within its portfolio. To date, MHS has successfully built 61 homes, with a further 72 under construction.

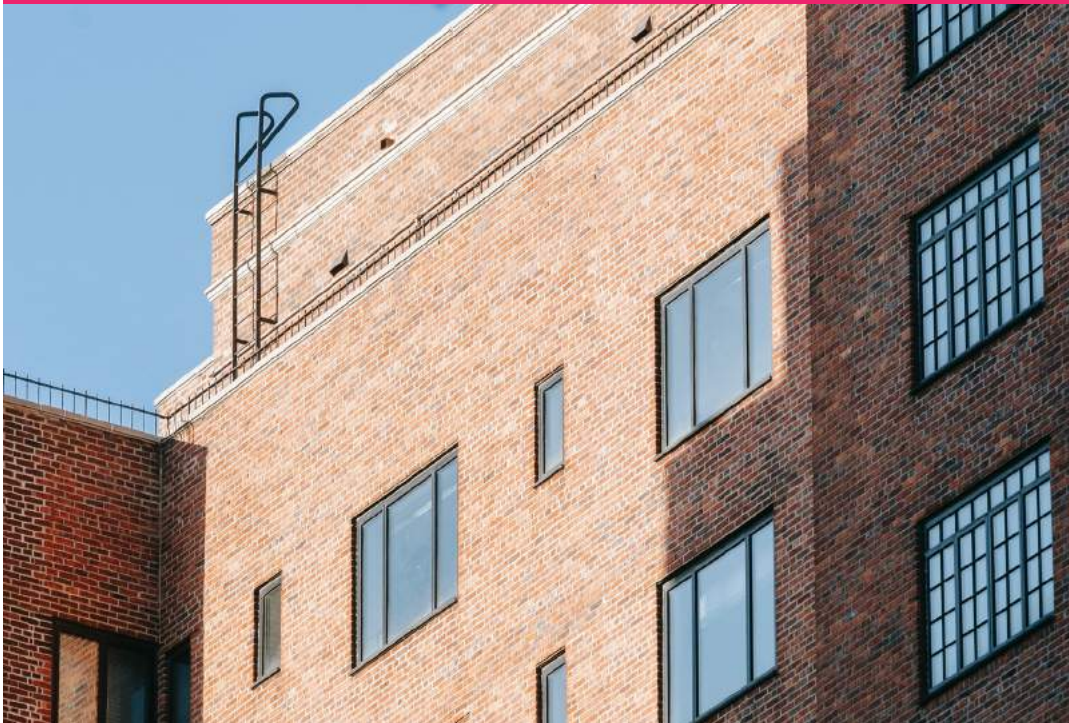


Sandpit Place by Peter Barber Architects for MHS and RB Greenwich  
Image credit Morley Von Sternberg.

## Inspiration from Elsewhere: Maximising Affordable Housing

### West of England Combined Authority (WECA) strategic partnership approach

WECA together with its constituent authorities and North Somerset Council have adopted a joint Spatial Development Plan. This aims to address the region's strategic, housing, planning, and infrastructure needs. Together under the West of England OPE Partnership, they have outlined ambitious housing targets by exploring property and estates collaboration at scale. Working in unison, they can achieve more than would be possible working independently. The regional partnership is a tool to drive efficiencies in housing delivery and support broader economic growth. As part of this new approach, they are focusing on previously overlooked small sites. The limited size of these sites has previously meant that resource and investment has not been available. Bringing them together under a single programme on a larger scale can unlock investment. By working together, they hope to enable greater efficiencies and create a more streamlined delivery process. This will reduce costs and improve the viability of these small sites.



Affordable housing in West of England Combined Authority, image credit Laura Tancredi

## Inspiration from Elsewhere: Maximising Affordable Housing

**Zurich, Switzerland: Working with cooperatives to deliver affordable homes.**

Zurich is one of the most expensive cities in the world. However, its use of cooperative forms of housing has ensured that affordable housing remains easily accessible. Zurich is home to more than 140,000 cooperatives. These are, in many instances, used to regenerate old industrial areas, brownfield land and other sites often overlooked or undervalued by the market. Kalkbreite is one such example. Built above a tram depot, it now hosts 200 affordable homes, workspace, and other community and leisure uses.



Kalkbreitestrasse by Müller Sigrist Architekten AG, Zurich, Switzerland - [Paolo Gamba](#)



## C. Embedding Innovation in Delivery

Small sites can offer the potential to support innovative construction approaches and housing typologies.

Public landowners can use their small sites programmes to indirectly encourage good growth and they can define criteria to assess bids which focus on or incentivise innovation. By working closely with chosen delivery partners, they can also encourage new approaches to development.

Here, we look at how Transport for London has worked closely with SMEs to deliver innovative schemes that have excelled.

## **Transport for London: Albany Road**

**How small sites can bring forward opportunity to work with smaller developers and how this in turn can optimise innovation on complex sites.**

Many small site projects face convergent challenges. That means resolving one issue can create another, so finding the right approach is vital.

TfL used the GLA's Small Sites x Small Builder programme's informal tender process to choose a developer for Albany Road. They selected House of Tuesday, to develop this former scaffolder's storage yard in Edmonton, north London. House of Tuesday incorporated their company in order to carry out bespoke developments, working closely with Stolon Studio. In this instance, the small sites programme helped House of Tuesday to expand their social value programme.

In a mixed residential and industrial area, the 0.13ha site was considered a complex one. House of Tuesday's design proposals responded to these challenges and tested new approaches to bringing forward this kind of plot. The courtyard design of family homes explored a new typology, one which is community focused.

Often the challenges of small sites require a creative approach to unlock them. Modern construction methods, creative layouts to use space and privacy concerns are all factors that can also be applied to much larger sites. That way, they too can reap the benefits.

Responding imaginatively to the challenges posed by small sites is key to their successful delivery. Working with small builders on sites like Albany Road provided an important opportunity to the small builder market. It also resulted in good value for TfL and a swift project delivery.



Albany Road, Edmonton – House of Tuesday & Stolon Studio. Images courtesy Stolon Studio.

## **Transport for London: Beechwood Avenue**

### **Working creatively to maximise the delivery of homes on a complex small site**

Beechwood Avenue is a site in Finchley by the North Circular Road. It is seen as a particularly complicated and constrained site. Before redevelopment, it was unused and covered in dense vegetation. Barnet Council first noted that development would be challenging, given its strange shape and proximity to the A406. Transport for London marketed the site through the Mayor's Small Sites x Small Builders Programme. They have since worked collaboratively with their chosen developer, Kuropatwa and design team (Peter Barber Architects) to build 97 residential and two commercial units.

Before construction was completed, the scheme won 'Best New Place to Live' in the London Planning Awards and the New London Architecture Housing Award. The low-rise, street-based approach incorporates private front doors for almost all units. It was described by Barnet Council's Principal Urban Design Officer as 'a pioneering, paradigm scheme that will be used in the future as a precedent for achieving high density in lower rise locations'. At first, the site capacity was estimated at around 30 units if developed to a typical suburban density. Yet the site has delivered more than three times that number, including additional affordable homes.

There is a sense that the site's success is a direct result of working with a flexible and creatively minded SME. Such developers are showing a capacity and tolerance for atypical approaches and sites that would likely be deemed too difficult by the largest housebuilders. There is no doubt that the small sites programme has achieved maximum value, housing delivery and exemplary design on this site.

Transport for London is now working with Kuropatwa to deliver additional complex sites. This has further cemented their relationship with a new developer that may otherwise not have happened.



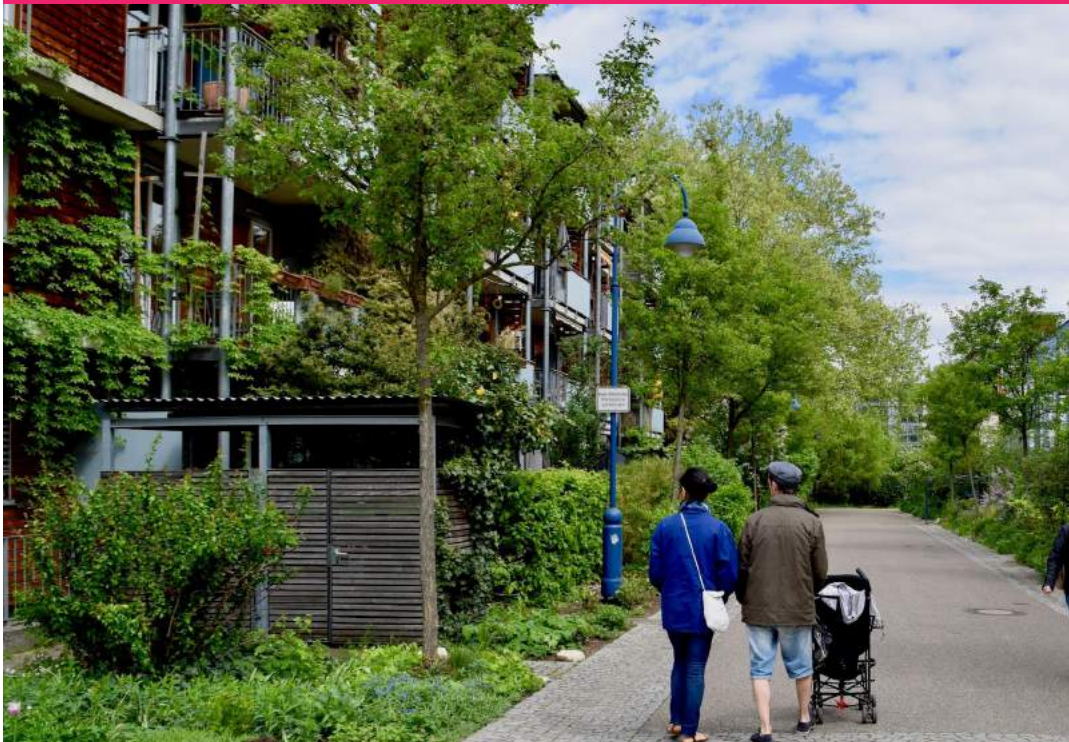
Beechwood Avenue, Finchley – Kuropatwa (Developer) and Peter Barber Architects

## Inspiration from Elsewhere: Embedding Innovation in Housing

**Vauban, Freiburg, Germany: Limiting delivery partners to enable innovation and sustainability in housing delivery.**

In the 1990s, the city brought forward a large swath of brownfield land for development to tackle housing demand. The city funded major infrastructure and decontamination works across the site. By so doing, they were able to access cheaper finance and lower costs by addressing infrastructure needs across the site as a whole. The city created a masterplan for the area, funding the infrastructure works from the sale of plots. The preference was to work with small builders and 70 per cent of the homes were built by housing cooperatives.

The municipality has used this approach to further both social and environmental agendas. They require all developments on their land to be low energy, whilst one third of all housing must be affordable. Thorough consultation with the community is vital. The municipality requires early engagement with local residents to shape public spaces.



Vauban, Germany, image credit Emmett Russell Architects'

## Inspiration from Elsewhere: Embedding Innovation in Housing

### **Aarhus, Denmark: Using early public investment to deliver innovation and affordability.**

Denmark's second largest city is growing. In Aarhus the municipality plays an active role in encouraging and enabling housing development. The municipality can acquire land when it is in the public interest and takes a proactive approach in doing this. The municipality installs the services and infrastructure needed, before making plots available for development. Plots of varying sizes are released. This provides opportunities for housing associations, self-builders, and cooperative groups. The municipality uses its central website to market these opportunities, which has worked well.

By delivering housing on municipality owned land, it can guide the ultimate outcomes so that they meet local policy objectives. The city is seen as a leader of innovation, with new housing developments beacons of sustainable development and affordability.



Aarhus, Denmark, image credit [IMBiblio](#)

## 8 CONCLUSIONS

The development of London's small sites is (and will continue to be) a key tool for tackling our housing crisis. It can also support our small builder and developer sectors, and can nurture innovation, in both construction methods and housing typologies.

However, market failures will continue to hinder delivery if they are not addressed. This means that there will continue to be a clear case for public sector intervention to unlock and enable development.

The Mayor's Small Sites x Small Builders programme has highlighted both the challenges and opportunities of developing London's small sites. The lessons learned from this programme (and from wider market activity) can help public bodies wishing to curate and cultivate small sites for development.

To this end, below is a brief list of recommended actions for public bodies and private landowners. These consolidate the key learnings and identify opportunities for effective action.

Consider these recommendations when designing and mobilising new small sites strategies or as a 'health check' for reviewing and refining existing programmes:

### 1. **Establish a Strong Site Pipeline**

Seek to establish a clear and robust pipeline of sites, which can be approached and promoted to the market as a programme.

### 2. **Identify Key Priorities and Desired Outcomes**

Define the role that your small sites programme will play in meeting your strategic priorities for housing delivery and communities:

- a. Agreeing objectives at the start will provide an important

framework for the delivery of small sites. Public landowners across London have used their small sites programme to deliver on wider strategic objectives. For example, working with community-led housing groups to deliver innovation.

- b. Small sites can be a good way to unlock innovation in the delivery of homes. For example, there is opportunity to champion good growth principles, low carbon and MMC through small sites delivery. If driving innovation or delivering affordable homes is a priority, identify this early to ensure that the right delivery markets are targeted.
- 3. Focus on Clear Communication**  
Ensure there is enough clear information about each site and the process for (and expectations from) development. This will help encourage market interest.
  - 4. Define Delivery Partner Needs & Potential**  
Understand your local target small developer and small builder markets and how their needs and abilities can be addressed through your approach to market. For example, developers could include registered providers, community self-build developers or private developers.
  - 5. Understand Your Market**  
Do direct developer market testing of your programme. This will help you recognise where market failures exist and where the case for site-specific funding can be made to unlock development.

**6. A Clear and Transparent Tender Process**

Provide a single platform, portal or pathway for marketing sites. Give clear guidance about development expectations, processes and specimen standard form agreements. This can build the confidence of new entrants and help public landowners find the right delivery partner:

- a. Many small developers reported that they found it hard to find opportunities, making effective marketing a priority.
- b. A streamlined and considered approach can deliver efficiencies that reduce pressures on local authority resources.

**7. Ensure a Thorough Due Diligence Process**

Carry out due diligence of your portfolio early on. This will provide better site information to the market up-front and can de-risk opportunities to encourage developer interest.

**8. Establish a Supportive Planning Environment**

Seek to establish a supportive planning environment for your small sites programme. Planning risk is a major barrier to the delivery of small site. Upfront liaison with planning departments and continuous collaboration on sites will help reduce this risk.

**9. Create Shared Purpose and Early Buy-In**

Create a 'shared purpose' for small sites across key departments. Cross-departmental Small Sites steering groups have the potential to focus attention and drive activity.

**10. Explore the Potential for Direct Delivery**

Explore and mobilise opportunities for direct delivery. This could include building within the Housing Revenue account (where possible) or through wholly owned or partnered housing delivery and management companies.



## 9

# CONTRIBUTORS AND THANKS

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- Albany Road, Edmonton – House of Tuesday & Stolon Studio
- Beechwood Avenue, Finchley – Kuropatwa & Peter Barber Architects
- Vauban, Germany - Emmett Russell Architects'
- Aarhus, Denmark - [IMBiblio](#)

## 10

# ABOUT GOOD GROWTH BY DESIGN

The Mayor's Good Growth by Design programme seeks to enhance the design of the built environment to create a city that works for all Londoners. This means development and growth should benefit everyone who lives here. As such, it should be sensitive to the local context, environmentally sustainable and physically accessible.

The programme calls on all involved in London's growing architectural, design and built environment professions to help realise the Mayor's vision.

Good Growth by Design uses the skills of both the Mayor's Design Advocates and the wider sector. This includes teams here at City Hall, the London Boroughs and other public bodies.

The programme covers six pillars of activity:

### **SETTING STANDARDS & INFORMING DELIVERY**

Using design inquiries to investigate key issues for architecture, urban design and place-shaping, in order to set clear policies and standards in support of the London Plan and other Mayoral strategies and initiatives.

### **ENSURING QUALITY**

Ensuring effective design review and scrutiny across the GLA and London more widely, including the establishment of the London Review Panel.

### **BUILDING CAPACITY**

Enhancing the GLA Group's and boroughs' ability and resource to shape new development to deliver good growth.

## **SUPPORTING DIVERSITY**

Working towards a more representative sector and supporting the design of a more inclusive built environment.

## **COMMISSIONING QUALITY**

Ensuring excellence in how the Mayor and other public- sector clients appoint and manage architects and other built environment professionals.

## **CHAMPIONING & LEARNING**

Advocating best practice to support success across the sector.

## **THE MAYOR'S DESIGN ADVOCATES**

The Mayor's Design Advocates are 42 built environment professionals. They were chosen for their skill and experience to help the Mayor support London's growth through the Good Growth by Design programme. They are independent and impartial, and provide support, advice, critique and expertise on London's built environment. The group includes practitioners, academics, policy makers and those from community-led schemes. Fifty percent of the advocates are women, and one in four are from a BAME background.

## **SETTING STANDARDS: UNLOCKING LAND TO SUPPORT A MORE DIVERSE HOUSING SUPPLY**

The Mayor's Design Advocates and City Hall's Regeneration and Economic Development and Housing and Land teams have been developing research related to the Small Sites x Small Builders programme. This work has been led by the Housing and Land team, with support from a number of GLA Group teams including GLA Regeneration.

This document is a call to action for the built environment sector to join the Mayor of London in applying new approaches to small sites, with the aim of supporting a more diverse housing supply for Londoners.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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