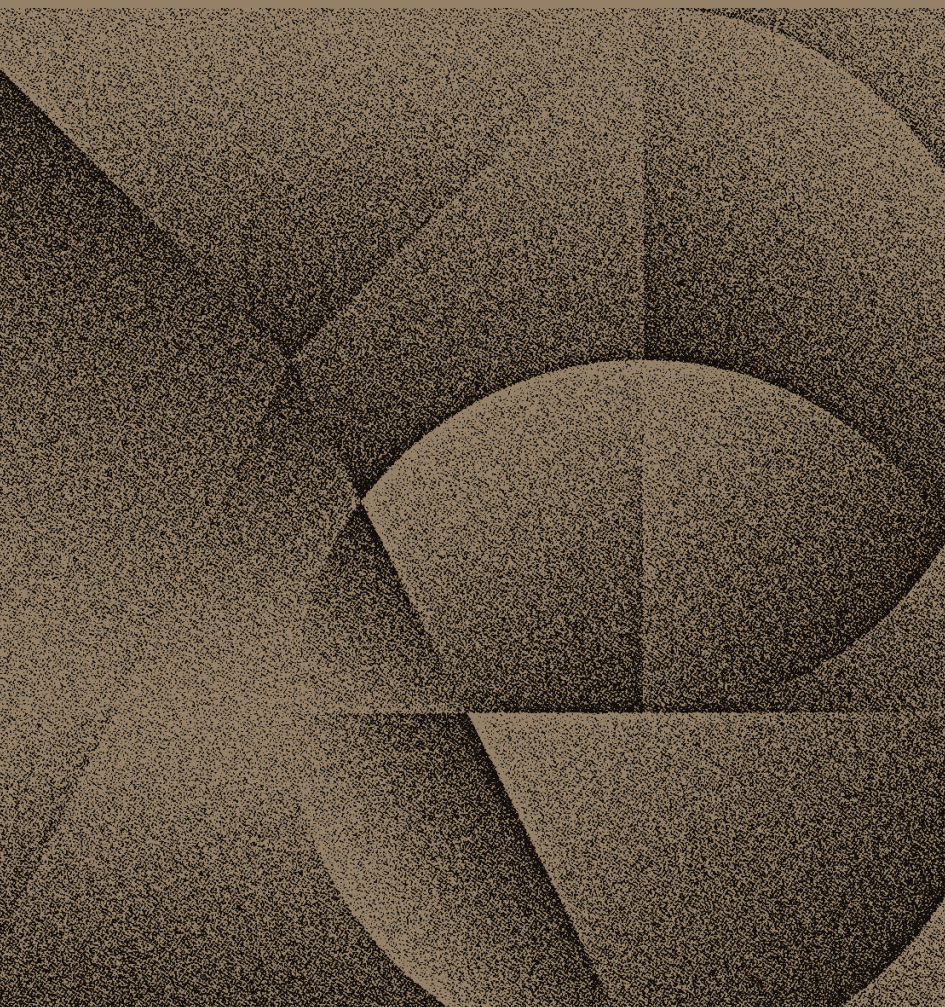


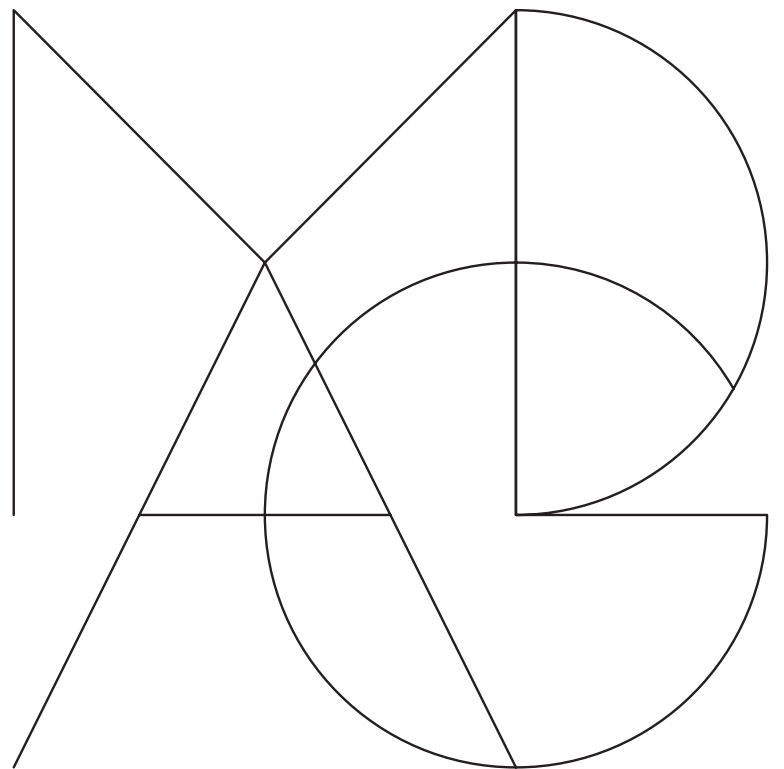
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*Public London:  
Creating the best public realm*

Peter Murray  
Fred Manson  
Pam Alexander

# A great city's future

*Foreword by Daniel Moylan, chairman, the Mayor's Design Advisory Group (MDAG)*

By 2030 one and a half million people – almost as many as currently live in Birmingham – will be added to the 8.5 million living here in London. Accommodating that growth in a way that allows the city and its people to thrive and prosper will be extraordinarily challenging. Only if we think long term and plan ahead will we make a success of it.

Parliament has placed the Mayor of London squarely at the heart of getting this right, through the Mayor's statutory strategic responsibilities for the city's spatial development and its transport and environmental planning. With a new Mayor due to be elected in May 2016 and a new London Plan and other strategies to be produced, this is the moment to build on the work of the past and to shape this great city for its future.

Over the last year, members of the Mayor's Design Advisory Group, representing a range and diversity of views, have been working on four topics identified as crucial to getting the strategy right. They are *Growing London, Public London, Ageing London and Shaping London*. Together these reports form the *Good Growth Agenda*.

This publication - *Public London* - seeks to identify the right approach to planning and creating the public realm – the spaces around (and sometimes within) buildings in which we can go to and fro, meet people and enjoy the city. London has greatly improved its public realm in recent decades but the demands of a rising population make high

quality public space ever more a necessity, rather than a luxury. This publication offers interesting new ideas on how we can meet that need.

## The Good Growth Agenda

*Essay by Peter Murray, MDAG member, and Patricia Brown, MDAG Deputy Chair*

London is growing. Birth rates are on the up, Londoners are living longer and are requiring places in which to live that match their active lifestyles. At the same time, more people want to come here, work here, and stay here.

The capital has experienced periods of rapid growth before. The population grew from 1 million in 1800 to 6.5 million a century later - an increase of around 140 people a day. The result was a city of great grandeur but also one of squalor, overcrowding and poor health. In the first three decades of the 20th century, the population continued to increase to a peak in 1939 of 8.61 million. This growth was largely accommodated by the development of the suburbs, supported by the expanding transport infrastructure. The resultant sprawl of 'Metro-land' spread out into the Home Counties and hugely increased the capital's footprint.

London's population has now surpassed 1939 levels, and is continuing to rise. For the first time, the majority of this growth is planned to be absorbed within London's boundaries, constrained as it is by an extensive Green Belt.

As a result, we have to make better use of the land we have available. We have to develop more densely, and we need to do so within the context of the existing urban fabric and communities. To absorb this growth in population within the fixed area of London will be no mean task. The physical

impacts will be highly evident and ubiquitous – on the ground, underground and on the skyline.

The impact on London of building homes for nearly 70,000 more people and of accommodating 34,000 new jobs each year is huge. It will affect its built form, its infrastructure, its streets and transport systems, as well as its health and education services.

We have to build around 50,000 new homes per annum over 20 years – even more if we are to make up for the historic shortfall – and space for more than eight Canary Wharfs' worth of jobs, as well as schools, health facilities, shops and cultural centres.

So, how do we create a London of the future that we will still want to live in? How do we make sure that growth delivers a high quality environment that does not feel alien to London, or to Londoners? What are the key design issues that must be addressed if we are not to emulate the rookeries of the Victorians, the sprawl of the 1930s or the monocultural estates of the post war era? How, indeed, do we get what we are calling 'good growth'?

We believe that 'good growth' results in an inclusive city that is a pleasant place to work, visit or stay. It delivers a balanced mix of young and old, of housing tenures, of jobs. It enriches the city's great public and civic spaces both internal and external. It allows for vitality and change, building on the 'London-ness' that is a crucial part of the capital's character and enduring appeal. Finally, 'good growth' provides the kind of integrated infrastructure and services that enable Londoners to lead fulfilled lives.

Through this series of reports – the Good Growth Agenda – we set out the key challenges

and opportunities that result from London's dramatic growth. We promote a vision and a series of recommendations - to help support and shape the physical growth that is planned for London to continue to be a thriving and great capital city. We hope this opens up an inclusive debate about how we best achieve good growth.

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# Introduction

As London grows, its public spaces are being placed under ever greater pressure. They are being asked to be more flexible, to work harder and to accommodate more diverse activity, whilst retaining their civic quality, historic identity and universal accessibility. This agenda report looks at these challenges and proposes steps a mayor could take to overcome some of the barriers that exist to delivering a world-class public realm for all Londoners, across the whole of the city.

A previously prevailing culture of zoning and separation has been challenged in favour of one of mixing uses and improving connectivity.

The Mayor's office has recognised the importance to London of its public space – its streets, squares, parks and waterways – since it began life in 2000. Both Ken Livingstone and Boris Johnson have embraced the responsibility of strategic government to protect and nurture London's public realm and to build consensus around the design and development of new and improved public spaces. Indeed, over the last 15 years, a major programme of public space improvements has been implemented in London directly by the Greater London Authority (GLA) and Transport for London (TfL), by London boroughs, by private developers and by local groups. Progress has been made, too,



in undoing the dominance of vehicles on London's streets, on improving conditions for walking and cycling, and on providing spaces for cultural activity. A previously prevailing culture of zoning and separation has been challenged in favour of one of mixing uses and improving connectivity.

Londoners are also becoming accustomed to carefully designed streets, squares and parks that are safe and comfortable places to be in and move through, but which also have the potential to be the setting for thrilling and extraordinary events. These include spaces like Trafalgar Square, Potters Fields Park, Kensington High Street, Gillett Square, Windrush Square, Exhibition Road, Queen Elizabeth Park, Barking Town Square and Oxford Circus. They are also becoming used to a welcoming public realm that extends beyond the traditional streets, squares and parks to places like the Royal Festival Hall, the Barbican or Kings Place, which blur the boundary between inside and outside and are as much part of that collective experience.

However, there are new challenges ahead. Our understanding of public realm is much broader than it was only a couple of decades ago, when the World Squares for All project triggered a renaissance of public space delivery in London. There is now a good deal of energy and creativity behind local improvements across the city driving 'meanwhile' and more permanent activation of public realm, often with a very articulated cultural and community dimension. But in many places, large-scale urban change is presenting very real technical, logistical and environmental challenges to let these spaces flourish. This report agenda sets out how the city might respond to those changes.

## *Defining the public*

What is public realm? The public realm is commonly defined as any space that is free and open to everyone. The London Plan describes it as 'the space between and within buildings that is publicly accessible, including streets, squares, forecourts, parks and open spaces.'<sup>1</sup> But it is much more than that. It is the collective backdrop to how the city is understood and experienced.

So, why does it matter? Since the creation of the first cities, public realm has been the 'glue' that holds them together. It is where the daily life of the city is played out; where we meet, sit, relax, eat, play, wander, reflect, debate, dissent, do business and enjoy a whole host of other freedoms. In addition, as a consequence of the rise in more flexible models of working and an advanced digital connectivity, activities that had previously been confined to the office are becoming more visible in the public sphere – inside as well as outside of buildings. A successful public realm is dependent on understanding that its quality is defined not only by spatial and physical characteristics, but also by social and cultural conditions. Understanding this is key to adopting a wider definition of the public realm that acknowledges its importance as a symbolic, as well as a functional, concept.<sup>2</sup>

'The measure of a city's greatness is to be found in the quality of its public spaces, its parks and squares'. So wrote John Ruskin in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Fast-forward to today, and things have changed very little. To stay liveable, cities need to keep creating and caring for these civic places and spaces that add such richness to everyday life.

The evidence exists that these spaces are of more than ephemeral benefit, too. Studies comparing the attractiveness of global cities as business locations such as the Global Financial Centres Index.<sup>3</sup> consistently rank London at either number one or two in the world. Furthermore, the need to attract and retain professional talent has a strong influence on the demand for more attractive, high-quality urban spaces, as well as buildings, and a broader range of 'softer' indicators are taken into account in the assessment of the quality of life of cities, for example in the EIU's Liveability Ranking or *Monocle's* Quality of Life Survey.

If London wants to sustain its position at the top, the Mayor will need to continue to champion the values of well-designed public realm fit for all aspects of civic life.

With rapid urbanisation around the world, high-quality public space is widely accepted as being an essential component in achieving a range of benefits that are synonymous with sustainable urban development, such as:

- Economic benefits: direct and indirect employment; inward investment and business location; attraction for workforce; uplift in property and rental values; visitor, worker and resident spending; amenity space for the growing SME sector.

- Environmental benefits: improving air quality; reducing pollution; cooling urban heat islands; increased biodiversity; wildlife habitats; supporting/providing infrastructure for greening measures/green energy generation; reuse of redundant and derelict spaces; food growing.
- Social and cultural benefits: civic identity; confidence and greater sense of place and belonging; greater social and cultural use/capital; community cohesion; improved health and wellbeing; reduction of crime and anti-social behaviour and increased safety; increased accessibility; fewer accidents; increased opportunities for learning, skills development and volunteering; places for people of all walks of life; play for children and young people.<sup>4</sup>

So it follows that, if London wants to sustain its position at the top, the Mayor will need to continue to champion the values of well-designed public realm fit for all aspects of civic life, supporting local authorities, landowners, developers, businesses and communities in their thinking about the spaces we hold dear. In other words, to create 'good growth' in public realm, with successful civic places, fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### *Public past*

Much has been achieved in this area over the last two decades. In many European cities, public realm projects were critical to their post-war restoration. In the UK, the importance and value of public realm has begun to feature more prominently on the political agenda over the past 15-20 years, through

*Over 250 public spaces have been improved with support from the Mayor*



initiatives like World Squares for All and through investment from the Millennium Commission and the Lottery.<sup>5</sup> In London, the formation of the Mayor's Office in the year 2000 catalysed an overall vision for the city's development, and with it public realm improvements led strategically by the public sector, funded and implemented by both the public and private sectors. The strategic objectives for public realm in the capital are set out in the London Plan. It states that 'London's public spaces should be secure, accessible, inclusive, connected, easy to understand and maintain, relate to local context, and incorporate the highest quality design, landscaping, planting, street furniture and surfaces'<sup>6</sup>.

Both the previous and current mayor have initiated and supported the creation of new public spaces and improvements to existing public spaces through a range of initiatives and programmes, including the Mayor's 100 Public Spaces (2002-8) and those captured under the London's Great Outdoors umbrella (2009-ongoing). More than 250 projects have been delivered or are underway by bringing together public and private investment, ranging from temporary interventions and community-led pocket parks, over rejuvenated high streets and town centres, to the radical transformation of Trafalgar Square and Exhibition Road and the creation of new spaces such as Granary Square in King's Cross and the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park.

Much more continues to be done, besides. There is a noticeable shift from squares and parks in central London to supporting place-based improvements as a means of wider regeneration. A large range of new and improved public spaces will be implemented over the coming years,

particularly those focused around infrastructure, including the completion of the Crossrail urban integration schemes as well as those in areas of major regeneration such as Elephant & Castle and Tottenham.

But we cannot afford to rest on our laurels. Over the coming years, there are a number of important challenges that will need to be faced. At the same time, the opportunities that arise from new technologies and ways of working need to be seized. More than ever, the Mayor is required to provide leadership and strategic direction to those involved in the championing, designing, delivering and managing London's public realm.

## Issues and recommendations

### 1. Building an alliance of public, private and local interests

The way public space schemes are funded has changed significantly in recent years. This is a result of reduced public sector budgets and a greater involvement of the private sector, especially in key areas of urban regeneration. It is unlikely that this trend will reverse in the foreseeable future.

There is now recognition of the economic benefits of public space within the private sector. Over the past few years, the Great Estates have demonstrated that investing in public realm improvements is regarded as essential to sustaining the success of an area.<sup>7</sup> Successful examples include Mount Street by Grosvenor or Marylebone by Howard de Walden. Landowners and developers in other areas are also taking an increasing role in financing, delivering and maintaining public space – for example in Elephant and Castle and the Vauxhall Nine Elms Battersea Opportunity Area. Presenting the best business case for investment in the public realm, however, means demonstrating the additional financial value that high-quality public realm can generate over a lower-quality one, and how it can also unlock further funding. This is not a quick win, but often a longer-term strategy that requires constructive partnerships between local authorities, private sector and local communities.

Most new schemes, therefore, will need to be considered from the outset as partnership

initiatives, pooling investment from different sources, with briefs that reflect the objectives and interests of the funding partners and stakeholders. These briefs will also take into account the limited resources local authorities have to provide maintenance or enforcement to public spaces. The Mayor is best placed to broker these fundamental agreements that serve Londoners in the best possible way.

Crowdfunding and commercial partners can also offer opportunities to lever in finance and foster engagement, but one needs to be mindful of sensitivity issues of branding and public perception of who owns the space if the sense of the public realm as a civic amenity is not to be undermined.

A dedicated Public Realm Taskforce can provide best practice advice and advocacy to the Mayor to ensure a growing London remains as competitive and attractive as it is today.

Londoners want to live in connected places that are lively, full of energy and not on 'island' developments. Developers, planners and designers agree in principle that there needs to be strong leadership from City Hall to build on this in-principle agreement, coordinate efforts, foster new partnerships, mediate conflicting interests, support skills and push for innovation. The Mayor can play a vital role in turning this consensus into a genuine

partnership to deliver the quality of public space that London needs. A dedicated Public Realm Taskforce can provide best practice advice and advocacy to the Mayor to ensure a growing London remains as competitive and attractive as it is today. A key topic for the task force would be to explore a common approach to long-term maintenance of public spaces, recognising lifetime costs and the need for custodianship.

The Task Force would also play a vital role in the ongoing promotion of London's public realm. With a professional audience, it could stimulate a dialogue about the public realm we wish to see. Its work could also inform any activities designed to promote the values of public realm to a broader audience – Londoners and visitors alike – highlighting what London's outdoors has to offer. Such campaigns could for example promote the public spaces that meet the needs of an increased number of elderly people (see Good Growth Agenda 3 - Ageing London) and more families with children living in high-density neighbourhoods with reduced access to private amenity space.

### *Feeding back*

Design quality matters more than ever before. Clear, qualitative objectives, design monitoring and evaluation of public realm delivery are important to ensure that limited resources are well spent and achieve best value for money. Place-based design reviews are one way to ensure that the emphasis is on designing how people will use and live in these spaces and neighbourhoods, and how new interventions will fit in with existing and emerging

urban structures. This does not only concern the finished space, but needs to include all stages of the delivery process, from procurement and scheme design to delivery planning and the co-ordination of construction logistics. Sharing lessons learnt on this across London – successes as well as mistakes – would produce great benefits in the delivery of future schemes.

Sharing lessons learnt on this across London – successes as well as mistakes – would produce great benefits in the delivery of future schemes.

Without the capacity to proactively plan, coordinate, and deliver new and improved public spaces at a local level, the quality, diversity and liveability of London's built environment risks being compromised. London's accelerated change demands a proportionate strengthening of London's placeshaping capability to ensure we are making the most of opportunities to build great spaces and places. A significant factor in this endeavour will be the ability to sustain – and in areas of significant growth to increase – the skills in the public sector to support project delivery. A step change in design and engineering practice is already happening, and there is a rich pool of talent available in London.

However, we also need to think differently how public sector decision makers can learn, and where they can draw inspiration from, including from other cities facing similar challenges. This will ensure that local people and businesses are properly engaged,

with quality objectives maintained from early design stages through to completion of the works. This placeshaping skills capacity element is taken up in the *Good Growth Agenda 4: Shaping London*.

### *Cultural communities*

Public realm is an active asset. We need to think ahead how spaces – the physical infrastructure – can support the ever-expanding range of civic activities within them. There is a noticeable increase in demand by Londoners and visitors for more and varied outdoor experiences including art performances, sports, food and markets as a result of successful events including the 'Summer Like No Other' of 2012.

It comes as no surprise that in London the critical mass of cultural assets<sup>8</sup> is a big driver behind this movement. 'Showtime', London's biggest ever pan-London outdoor arts festival, was enjoyed by 1.5 million people, over half of whom had never experienced an outdoor performance previously. The audience profile mirrored London's diversity, which was a first in audience development terms. In fact, almost all (94 per cent) of the audiences said it made their neighbourhoods feel more vibrant.<sup>9</sup>

London's built environment, parks and public realm lend themselves to outdoor events and festivals that create a unique sense of occasion. The annual Totally Thames Festival brings delight and surprise to the 42-mile stretch of the River Thames in London. Through public art projects such as the Fourth Plinth Commissioning Programme – the UK's biggest sculpture prize –

the Mayor is successfully integrating contemporary art into the cityscape. Alongside these high profile interventions, the Mayor has continued to support local and community-based festivals across London, recognising their value in providing distinct cultural experiences and a sense of belonging.

Cultural activation of spaces is becoming increasingly important, but it needs to be carefully planned through appropriate curation. Sometimes a more light-touch approach can be more suitable to ensure the enduring qualities of the places themselves are not compromised.

Equally, the meaningful activation of public spaces to support public life and strengthen a sense of place can be compromised in areas that are affected by extensive redevelopment and construction in order to facilitate London's long-term growth. The Mayor should therefore lead on developing model approaches in the form of guidance and exemplars to the place- and people-friendly management of construction in areas undergoing change. This is especially the case where it takes place over a prolonged period. These areas need to be designed as pieces of city in their end state as well as in the interim.

The introduction of meaningful temporary uses, art or greening can be very effective to counter some of the impacts of construction on public life, the environment, local movement and perception of an area, and instil some sense of continuity. 'Meanwhile' uses should also be promoted to encourage experimentation and innovation. They will need to be carefully considered from the outset to ensure public engagement in their design and integration with construction and traffic management plans.

### *Civic pride*

Keeping London open is both a privilege and a challenge. Jan Gehl's advocacy of a 'people-centred' approach that starts with understanding how people use and appropriate public realm has been influential in changing attitudes.<sup>10</sup> It is now widely accepted that a sense of custodianship – where there is a feeling of civic pride and belonging – is fundamental to people's enjoyment and appreciation of their environment. This, in turn, acts as a deterrent to anti-social behaviour. More recently, local people have become more empowered in the creation and care of spaces through social media, crowdfunding platforms and volunteering initiatives.

The Mayor should ensure that access to privately owned public space is as unrestricted and unambiguous as possible, and can accommodate different people from all walks of life. This is becoming increasingly important with the private sector delivering and managing such spaces.

However, there is also a widespread interest and concern over who should control public realm as it is both defined by those who legally own it and those who use it.<sup>11</sup> This is important, as public realm should be free to use by everyone and accessible

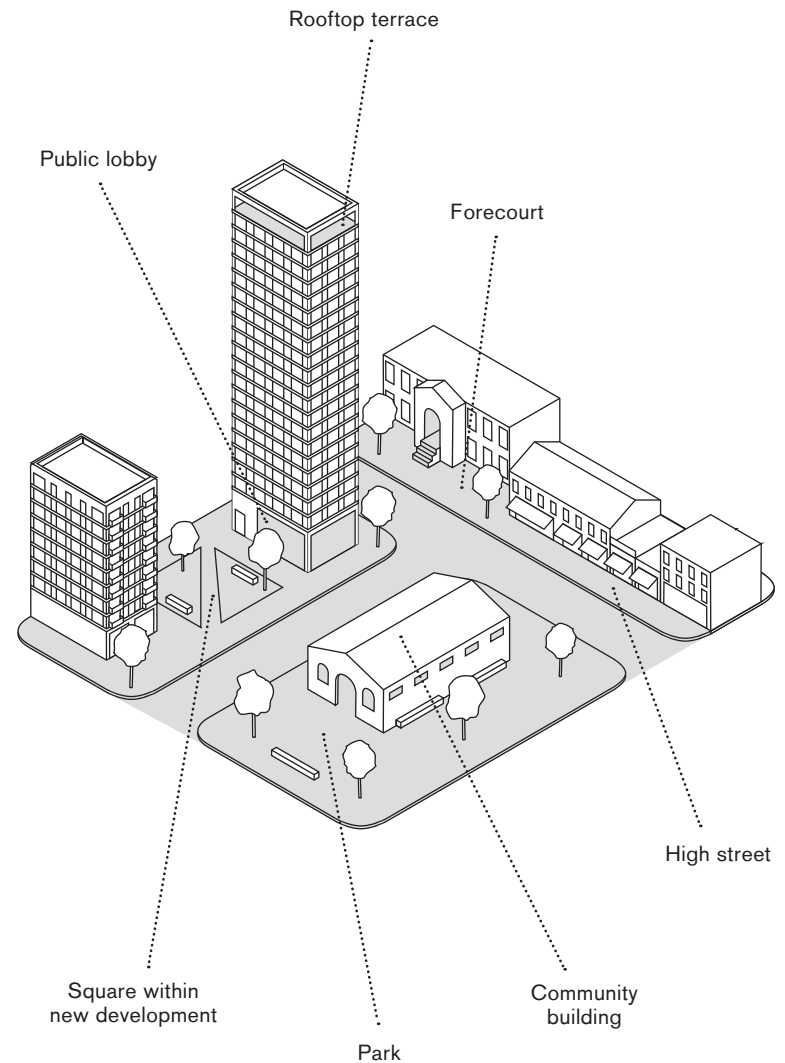
to all, regardless of their financial means. There is, therefore, an important role for the Mayor to set clear principles and provide a clear vision, in particular in the light of the growing extent of publicly accessible spaces that are under private ownership and management.

Where this type of 'corporatisation' of the outdoors occurs, especially in the larger, commercial developments, Londoners are concerned that people can feel, or are, excluded from parts of their own city, and that the rules of behaviour are weighted too heavily towards regulation and control.<sup>12</sup> This segregation between privately managed spaces and the surrounding, publicly managed areas need not occur, however. At King's Cross Central it was agreed that the London Borough of Camden would adopt the streets through the developer Argent's site. Elsewhere in the area, unrestricted public access has been agreed. Public accessibility can be a nuanced concept, but the Mayor should ensure that access to privately owned public space is as unrestricted and unambiguous as possible, and can accommodate different people from all walks of life. This is becoming increasingly important with the private sector delivering and managing such spaces.

### *Public indoors*

Public realm often extends beyond the façades that frame London's streets, squares and parks to the indoors of places like station concourses or the lobbies of cultural hubs like the Royal Festival Hall, the Barbican or Kings Place. The blurring

*Public realm is the tissue that holds the city together, made up of different kinds of freely accessible spaces inside and outside of buildings*





of the boundary between inside and outside is part of the collective experience of London's civic infrastructure. However, there is a risk that designated public indoor spaces are not effectively 'signposted' to fulfil their prime objective. It is therefore critical that the Mayor uses his or her influence in the planning process to ensure that all public spaces as part of new developments are designed and managed to be accessible and welcoming to all, seamlessly connecting to the ground level public realm of an area without any perceived thresholds that could inhibit or exclude people.

### *Free London*

London has a long tradition of being a tolerant, open and democratic city – this sense of freedom must persist. There should therefore be an agreement that public space should be accessible to as many people as possible for as much of the day as possible. The Mayor should champion the notion that byelaws that are agreed in a transparent way and through a democratically accountable process. These should become the default way of agreeing what controls there are on access to, or behaviour in, public space, whether it is publicly or privately owned. Where a development includes a new privately owned public space, the developer should agree that conditions on its use would be agreed through byelaws. There would be no restrictions on access or use except those agreed with and passed by the local authority. In this way, the principle of a democratically accountable and transparent management of public space can be established.

### ***Recommendations***

**To build genuine partnerships to deliver the quality of public space that London needs, the Mayor should:**

- 1a. Set up a Public Realm Task Force for London including leaders from the boroughs, businesses, the welfare sector, cultural organisations, amenity groups and design practitioners to inform future policy and investment and provide advocacy at the highest level.**
- 1b. Support better planning, urban design and placeshaping skills in London's local authorities (see Good Growth Agenda 4: Shaping London).**
- 1c. Encourage the industry and boroughs to support 'meanwhile' uses and improve the management of construction in areas of change.**
- 1d. Influence the design and management of indoor as well as outdoor public spaces in new developments to ensure these are clearly 'signposted', welcoming and truly inclusive.**
- 1e. Develop policy on activities in public spaces to be controlled in a transparent and democratically accountable way through the use of local byelaws.**

## 2. Optimising place and movement

### *Street life*

Streets are of particular relevance to the rethinking of public realm. London's streets carry 80 per cent of all journeys in the capital, or over 26 million journeys each day. Equally, they also form 80 per cent of its public space network, so play an important part in our daily life – as places where we live, work and move through.<sup>13</sup> TfL's Road Modernisation Plan has earmarked £4 billion of investment between 2014 and 2022 to to radically improve living and travelling conditions through safer, greener and more attractive streets and places. The TfL Streetscape Design Guidance has been updated to take into account the growing requirement for streets to become high quality environments that are functional, attractive and resilient to accommodate London's growth.

The Roads Task Force and subsequent development of the Street Types for London concept through TfL has made great strides in reconciling thinking on the place and movement functions of London's streets with the aim to inform future policy, land use planning, investment and design across the road network. For the first time, TfL and the boroughs have worked together to consistently map the complete highways network, using data and local knowledge, providing an innovative framework to balance place and movement at a pan-London scale.

It is important to recognise that the current Street Types concept cannot capture the individual character and specificity of London's places.

Nevertheless, in transport and spatial planning terms, the concept holds significant value in providing a new perspective to match the form and function of road space. The Street Types can help to strengthen the resilience of the street network by reminding all interested stakeholders that London's authorities must still protect their statutory road network management duties as well as encouraging attractive, safe and accessible space for civic life.

In public space terms, the city needs a push to counter homogeneity and sameness, and to instead foster or reinforce character – a sense of place rather than of being 'anywhere'.

Places are organic, and their level of activity and use pattern can change dramatically during different times of the day and week. Think of Wembley, say, or Soho. There is, however, currently a strong emphasis of places as 'destinations'. Therefore creative and refined approaches should be encouraged which would allow an area to evolve in response to user demand and strengthen the enduring, liveable qualities of places. Essentially, places, their individual communities and history, are what makes London, London – its multifaceted and kaleidoscopic identity. In public space terms, the city needs a push to counter homogeneity and sameness, and to instead foster or reinforce character – a sense of place rather than of being 'anywhere'.

It is important that the momentum behind the Street Types is maintained, that it is further embedded and developed to ensure its progressive approach becomes applied across all spatial scales to influence policy, land use planning, and TfL and borough processes. Ultimately, the principles of the Street Types for London need to be pushed into the project delivery on the ground by using them to inform strategic plans, design briefs and funding decisions, and ensure projects support the needs of all users. Street Types can help to address any imbalance between form and function, and, where appropriate, give greater emphasis to the vital functions of public realm, recognising that all successful places and cities require one key ingredient – people. Understanding how those people will arrive into, move across, linger in and enjoy an area remains a critical element of any design process.

The Mayor should assert a shared ambition for high quality public spaces by launching a comprehensive programme of Street Types pilot projects. These should seek to enhance the performance of streets against their place and movement functions by developing exemplary, experimental as well as deliverable solutions that meet this new agenda. This could, for example, include bold projects for the transformation of Parliament Square or Park Lane as well as smaller targeted interventions in Outer London.

### *Your good health*

Public realm keeps London in good health. This is of particular importance with regards to the transfer

of public health responsibilities to local authorities made in 2013 and to today's mounting concerns about high levels of obesity and air pollution. There is also now a clear understanding of the vital role that walking and cycling play in keeping Londoners in good health and the need for significant increases in both to prevent a range of serious illnesses including cardiovascular diseases and some cancers.

If all the short trips made by motorised modes that could be walked or cycled were switched to those modes, some £2.2 billion in health savings could be delivered each year.

Cycling as a means of getting around has become increasingly popular: cycling on London's main roads has risen by 173 per cent between 2001 and 2013.<sup>14</sup> The Mayor's Vision for Cycling, through the Mini Hollands, Quietways, Cycle Superhighways, and the Central London Cycle Grid projects, further aims to double cycling numbers over the next 10 years. But more could be done still – analysis shows that more than half of the potentially cyclable trips in London are in Outer London. These total around 2.4 million a day, most of which are made by car.<sup>15</sup>

Equally, the number of walking journeys is increasing, with 13.1 million journeys a day made on foot in 2013/14.<sup>16</sup> There is a small year-on-year growth in walked stages over five minutes, which is driven by walking as part of bus, rail

and underground journeys. This trend is likely to continue as the public transport network expands and improves. Walking levels are higher in London than in other English or Welsh urban areas, providing significant health benefits<sup>17</sup>, but there is potential to increase walking, especially in Outer London. If all the short trips made by motorised modes that could be walked or cycled were switched to those modes, some £2.2 billion in health savings could be delivered each year.<sup>18</sup> TfL's development of a Walking Strategy is thus timely, and an important step in meeting this challenge.

Across the city, much more needs to be done to improve the pedestrian and cyclist experience: The Healthy Streets Survey asks Londoners to rate the ten key indicators of the quality of experience on our streets, such as noise, air quality, feeling safe and having things to see and do. The first phase of this survey found that across all street types, the experience of these critical factors was below expectations and the poorest performing streets were those with a high 'movement' function and a low 'place' function. This survey tool is now being used for tracking across London and for assessing new schemes.<sup>19</sup>

### *An integrated approach*

It is clear that public space will continue to be affected by – and shape – the shift towards active travel. An Active Travel Commissioner could take on the brief to champion this agenda in a holistic way, rather than mode by mode. The commissioner would play a key part in the shaping of London's public realm, overseeing policy and programme delivery

in the building of healthier and more attractive environments, and in ensuring that public health and active travel objectives are factored into the planning and delivery process.

An Active Travel Commissioner could take on the brief to champion this agenda in a holistic way, rather than mode by mode.

A key part of the commissioner's brief should be to challenge transport modelling to look at all modes of travel in a more integrated way, taking into account the vital importance of walking and cycling and the monetised benefits that accrue from these forms of active travel to inform future investment plans.

### *Smarter London*

Smart technology is changing the way we use the city. London's economic success relies as much on the movement of people as on safe and efficient delivery and collection of goods and services. Road is by far the dominant mode for goods transport in London in terms of the weight of goods lifted.<sup>20</sup> The planned growth of London will lead to a 15 per cent increase in demand for freight and servicing by 2025.<sup>21</sup> There is a growing potential for smart technology to deliver more efficient surface transport – this needs to be studied and harnessed. This may, for example, include changing

use patterns of streets at different times of the day and week, improved logistics through consolidated deliveries, or driverless cars.

The independent Roads Task Force highlighted road charging as a potential means of optimising the use of London's road network. Many different pricing charges already exist or are being developed: the Congestion Charging Zone, the Low Emission Zone, the proposed Ultra Low Emission Zone (to be introduced in 2020) and the charging for the proposed Silvertown Link/Blackwall Tunnel. The Mayor should explore the benefits in simplifying into a single system. The Roads Task Force recommendations include continued operation of the Congestion Charge and to explore smarter charging for the use of road space beyond this by tolling for new road infrastructure and investigating the potential to use pricing more widely to manage demand and make more efficient use of the road space.

The smarter usage of our streets will have benefits for non-motorised traffic users, too. Timed restrictions open up new possibilities for pedestrians and cyclists, in particular for those less confident in otherwise busy urban environments such as the very young or elderly. Ciclovias and play streets are just two examples of creative change of use patterns used at different times of the day and week.

## *Recommendations*

To achieve accessible, healthy and vibrant urban spaces the Mayor should:

- 2a. **Assert the concept of Street Types for London and launch a comprehensive programme of pilot projects to help authorities deliver a cohesive vision on the balance of place and movement needed on any successful street.**
- 2b. **Establish the role of an Active Travel Commissioner to bring public transport, walking and cycling together to create a high quality public realm.**
- 2c. **Champion smarter use of streets and consider a single system for road charging.**

## 3. Supporting investment and design of public realm in key areas

London cannot grow without a better public realm. The city is confronted not only by a significantly upwardly revised population, but also by a changing demographic profile. It is recognised that within the spatial confines of the Green Belt there is a pressure to develop at higher densities, with more people living in flats and having less access to private gardens. London's public space network will therefore need to perform harder to support new and changing neighbourhoods and be attractive to a variety of users. This point is picked up in the *Good Growth Agenda 1: Growing London*.

London cannot grow without a better public realm.

There will be a greater demand for multifunctional spaces in terms of use as well as in their environmental performance. This will need to be balanced carefully against the ambition to ensure a rich and varied offer of unique spaces – from the tranquil and secluded to the active and animated – across the city. The changes in the demographic profile will also need to be planned for accordingly. For example, for older people to live healthy and sociable lives, the public realm around their homes needs to be safe, accessible and provided with appropriate opportunities to sit and rest. This element is developed in *Good Growth Agenda 3: Ageing London*.

In addition, increased public transport provision

such as that provided by Crossrail, the Overground, and the advent of the 24-hour-tube service means that more public spaces across London can be more easily accessed and potentially enjoyed by more people. This will require continued awareness-raising and signposting of what London has to offer – in particular in Outer London – as well as ensuring the infrastructure and management of spaces is set up to effectively deal with an increased use.

### *One London, many places*

There is an increased recognition of the importance of London's specific nature, its phenomenal diversity of neighbourhoods, their buildings, streets and spaces, and the need to respond to particular characteristics and qualities of places. This is being reflected in the government's Localism agenda and in emerging local plans. Recent trends in the visitor economy, such as Airbnb's growing market share in areas outside central London also show that there is an external demand to 'live like a local' – for local specificity and quality, highlighting the value of local knowledge, culture and heritage.

Ultimately, creating great local places in London is crucial to giving every Londoner a decent quality of life.

Ultimately, creating great local places in London is crucial to giving every Londoner a decent quality of life. With two-thirds of Londoners living within

five minutes' walk of London's high streets, these areas are best placed to fulfil this role.<sup>22</sup> This is why the GLA and partners are investing £185 million to ensure that high streets thrive.

The Mayor should continue to invest in the public welcome of high streets – the public realm of the street and adjacent spaces, but also acknowledging the street in three dimensions, including the buildings that front onto it. Through small but impactful adjustments like the appropriation of pockets of redundant space and bold moves like the wholesale recalibration of the street, the Mayor can help to make more vibrant high streets and shape better outdoor spaces. In so doing, this can help to create new jobs and support stronger businesses right across London. High streets are of particular relevance as 47 per cent of all businesses outside central London can be found here, and almost half of London's developable land is located within 200m of one.<sup>23</sup>

To ensure local plans and public space project delivery in these areas outside central London are as good as they can be, the Mayor will need to support appropriate placemaking skills in designers and engineers through consultation and engagement, and provide advice to local authorities and partners on how to capture local idiosyncrasies and specialness in project briefs. Emphasis should also be given to active travel considerations and the requirements of older people, providing the infrastructure to ensure these places can be easily and comfortably accessed and enjoyed by everyone.

*Investment in public realm should augment existing assets as well as focus on key areas of change*



*High streets - where local public life is played out*



*New central and inner London neighbourhoods - where the tension between place and movement is at its most acute*



*New transport infrastructure - around nodes with capacity for high density developments*



*All London Green Grid - connecting high-quality green spaces*





#### *Case study: Southall Great Streets*

The Southall Great Streets project is helping to build a safer and more pleasant environment for pedestrians, road users and businesses in one of London's busiest and most vibrant town centres. Pavements along the Broadway have been widened and the introduction of 'boulevard' zones helps pedestrians move more freely and safely. A series of bespoke mini-public spaces are being developed along South Road and The Green. These highlight local architectural features and community uses, and provide much-needed places for social encounter and exchange, creating a more civic and pleasant experience of the area. New signage and lighting at the entrances of Southall Park and improvements to building frontages complement the package of works to make the area more inviting and accessible.

#### *Central London is expanding*

Whilst outer London will see further intensification, inner London is growing again too, with significant impact on places like Aldgate, Old Street, Euston, Vauxhall and Elephant and Castle. The overall Inner London population was 4.4 million in 1939. It declined to 2.5 million by 1988 and returned to 3.2 million by 2011.<sup>24</sup> A priority for the Mayor will be to focus on new models and approaches for the expanding centre. Along the Inner Ring Road – but also a bit further afield around the Wandsworth and Shepherd's Bush gyratories – many of London's large-scale redevelopments are taking shape at rapid pace, contributing to the *de facto* expansion of the centre. Here the conflict between development, transport and the needs of existing neighbourhoods can be experienced at its most acute.

Bold approaches are required to rebalance and optimise the street, address public space deficiencies and instil a sense of civic pride.

When building at higher densities there should be an even greater focus on the quality of public space at the ground level in order to deliver sustainable and liveable urban neighbourhoods. To date, these places have been defined by a car-centric approach to urban planning. Bold approaches are required to rebalance and optimise the street, address public space deficiencies and instil a sense of civic pride. These should be exemplary projects, demonstrating



### *Case study: Elephant and Castle*

A new town centre is being created at Elephant and Castle. This will create 5,000 new jobs, 4,000 new homes, a new shopping centre, new tube station and a new leisure centre. The public realm must thus support not only the people who live there today but also those who will be moving in over the next decade. Following significant public engagement and with the buy-in of the borough and landowners, the public space has been designed by a carefully selected design team to balance the needs of many different groups of people, businesses and institutions. This project will improve the area for all by making it more accessible and inviting, while retaining the unique character of the Elephant, including its distinctive modernist architecture. The northern roundabout will be transformed into Elephant Square, a '21st century Piccadilly of the South'. This will provide a safer environment for people interchanging and travelling through, and create a generous, flexible civic space in one of London's biggest areas of change. The square has been designed to reduce the impact of car traffic and enable new uses. It will make the area feel cleaner and greener, and create a fairer balance between the needs of drivers, pedestrians and cyclists.

through great design and intelligent community engagement what is possible by investing in key growth areas.

### *New connections, new places*

London will need to meet the challenge of designing high quality integrated spaces in which to live, work and play, as well as spaces which cater well for arriving and leaving. Creating connected new urban neighbourhoods and breaking the severance to adjacent areas at a more local scale will be a prime objective for places affected by Crossrail 2 and High Speed 2, such as Euston and Old Oak Common. Much of the investment in these places will go into the transport infrastructure itself. Nevertheless, the huge benefits of a people-friendly local environment that is easily accessible on foot or by bike should not be overlooked and public space budgets scaled accordingly.

Much can be learnt from previous and ongoing major projects like Crossrail 1 and High Speed 1, for instance in Crossrail's urban integration plans and the work of the West End Partnership Public Realm Task Group. These lessons need to be reflected in future briefs to enable the right kind of public realm in key growth areas.

### *London's shades of green*

The UK capital is the greenest city of its size in the world. About 47 per cent of the city is green space and 2.5 per cent blue space – its rivers, canals, and reservoirs.<sup>25</sup> Green infrastructure has come to



#### *Case study: St Giles Circus*

As a result of the new London Underground and Crossrail station, the area around St Giles is set for considerable change. The scale of the interchange station is comparable to other major London stations such as King's Cross. The St Giles Circus project presented a rare and exciting opportunity within central London to win back vital public space at a previously congested urban crossroads in the centre of the city. In conjunction with a rebuilt station, St Giles Circus will become a 'front door' to the West End. The project also provides an opportunity to change perceptions of this busy area. The new public space will re-establish historic links, particularly between Oxford Street and Covent Garden. It will connect different urban forms and architectural styles, in particular, the medieval street pattern of St Giles with the setting of Centre Point. St Giles can reassert its presence and provide vital dwell space as well as connections to the surrounding urban quarters.

be seen as an essential part of creating a liveable city, bringing a wealth of environmental benefits such as storm water management, a reduction of the urban heat island effect, the absorption of pollutants and promotion of biodiversity. Alongside this, the transfer of public health responsibilities to local authorities made in 2013 has led to a much-increased focus on the benefits of green space. This has been the case for both the physical and mental health and wellbeing of children and adults.

*The London 2050 Infrastructure Plan*, published in 2014, sets out the infrastructure required for a growing population, including the equivalent of an additional 9,000 hectares – the equivalent of 63 Hyde Parks – of accessible green space across London to support leisure, health and amenity uses as well as economic and environmental ones. Mayoral policy already exists in the form of the *All London Green Grid (ALGG)*, which aims to create a strategic, interconnected series of high-quality green spaces connecting with town centres, transport hubs, and major neighbourhoods. Its aim is to support sustainable travel, healthy lifestyles, flood management and distinctive places, along with the consequent expected economic uplift.

The Mayor should continue and develop the *All London Green Grid* policy and delivery of key projects of green and blue spaces, in particular:

- Invest in projects that demonstrate the multi-functional aspect of green infrastructure. Projects should be those that improve and shape neighbourhoods and improve the quality of the amenity of an area but which also deliver critical services such as flood management.



#### *Case study: Rainham Marshes*

Rainham Marshes is a nature reserve that has retained much of its medieval landscape, and is the largest area of wetland on the upper parts of the Thames Estuary. A carefully scoped programme of interventions has helped to make Rainham Marshes accessible to the public, providing access to nature and wildlife. A strong, place-specific, thematic design approach, drawing on historic landscape structures and current landscape character of the site, has informed an integrated solution which takes advantage of opportunities for habitat creation and water management across the site. Interventions range from wayfinding signage, seating, installation elements and informal play areas to a suite of new foot- and cycle-bridges. Significant improvements to a strategically important pedestrian and cycle route linking Rainham village to the Thames have been achieved through an elevated trackway, a new straight-line walk down to marsh level from the existing bridge across the Eurostar line.

- Improve the quality of, and access to, the urban fringe of Outer London and the Green Belt. Considerable opportunities exist to increase the amount of public access to the countryside around London and generally to link fragmented areas of public open space, by both public transport and greener walking and cycling routes.
- Conserve and enhance the Thames riverside spaces, in particular where synergies exist with key development areas such as the Royal Docks, Barking Riverside, Thamesmead or Erith, and infrastructure projects like the Tideway Tunnel or the Silvertown Link.
- Provide green spaces as places for activity and events as well as escape from the city. Whilst green spaces will more often have to be flexible and serve than more than just one use, it is also important to ensure that London's green outdoors can provide areas of calm and recreation from the hustle and bustle of city life.

In line with the Government's commitment to producing a national plan to improve the management of our green spaces<sup>26</sup>, the Mayor should develop such a plan for London, building on the partnership arrangements developed through the *All London Green Grid* and community engagement catalysed by the Pocket Parks programme and similar mayoral initiatives.

## *Recommendations*

To make the greatest difference to the quality of life of Londoners within the context of the geography of growth, the Mayor should continue to:

- 3a. Invest in high streets where there is most potential to enhance all Londoners' quality of daily life.
- 3b. Invest in the public realm of new central and inner London neighbourhoods where the tension between place and movement is at its most acute and development is at its most dense.
- 3c. Invest in the public realm around new transport infrastructure where there are major benefits to be gained by designing interchange integrated with the grain of local areas and where the highest densities of development are likely.
- 3d. Invest in London's parks, green spaces and waterways that provide a green infrastructure that is essential for the sustainability of the city.

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MDAG provides a combination of external expertise to the Mayor and GLA Group, engaging in thematic reviews, topic exploration, and place-based design reviews – including longer-term involvements in places like Old Oak Common or with programmes such as the ‘Mini Hollands’. It also provides an advocacy role with regard to London and its significant design community.

New London Architecture (NLA) is an independent forum for discussion, debate and information about architecture, planning, development and construction in the capital. Over a series of months, NLA invited representatives from across the built environment to take part in a series of expert roundtables, which helped to shape the agenda for each paper.

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## Notes

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