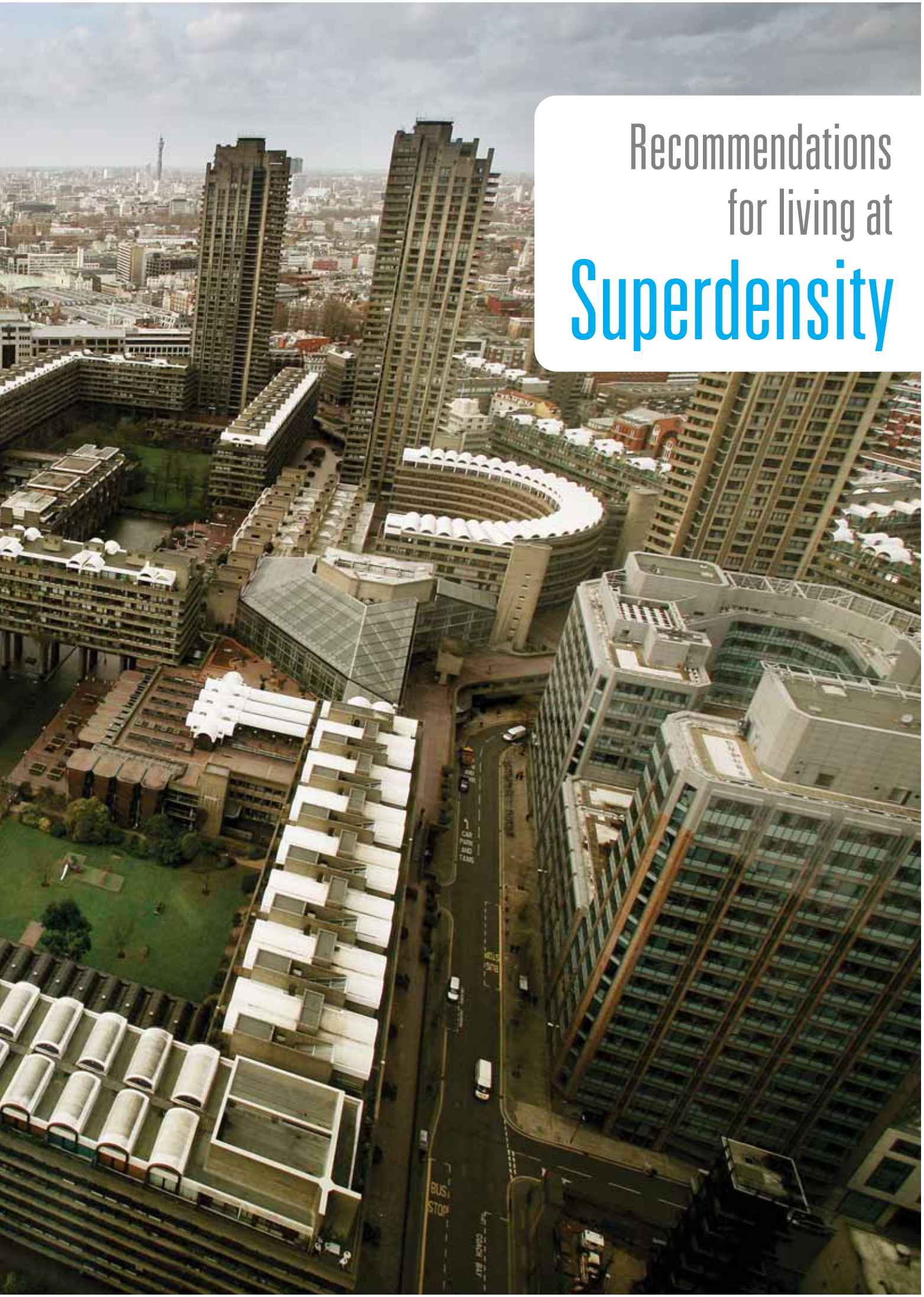


Recommendations for living at Superdensity

Superdensity

Foreword

London's population is growing faster than any other European city. More homes at higher densities are needed if we are to meet the increased demand and changing demographics of London's residents. However we must not sacrifice quality in the drive to increase the supply of housing in London. To create successful and sustainable communities, more homes of the right size, type and tenure, built at higher densities in appropriate locations are needed. We must also respond to the challenge of climate change and provide decent space standards to meet people's diverse needs.

Design for London welcomes this report on understanding how we can design successful high density developments, and in particular how we can respond to the challenge of providing good family housing as we build at increasingly higher densities. We particularly commend the authors for bringing together and addressing a series of difficult and complex issues, from the provision of outdoor space, access to local facilities and decent space in the home, to how we procure, deliver and manage new housing developments. As the authors have identified, design cannot be viewed in isolation to wider issues of management, the cost of services and even levels of occupancy. All need to be considered together if we are to sustain the long-term viability of a development and its surrounding area.

We look forward to working further with the authors as well as our other partners across London to address the important issues raised in this report. Design for London are especially keen to explore the impacts on built form in more detail. What might an environmentally sustainable family home look like in 21st century London? What internal building and external site layouts will best provide both private and public outdoor space to help ensure a better quality of life in higher density developments? Should we regulate internal space standards – for both market and social housing? How do we ensure our best intentions on a plan are actually valued throughout the development process and delivered on the ground?

This report provides a useful foundation for further work Design for London will be taking forward on housing design guidance as part of the upcoming Mayor's Housing Strategy.

Peter Bishop

Director, Design for London
July 2007

Design for London

Odham's Walk, Covent Garden

Superdensity

A need to pool experience

This report was produced in the hope of influencing the Mayor's Housing Strategy. It is the work of four of London's major consultants specialising in residential development – HTA, Levitt Bernstein, PRP and Pollard Thomas Edwards architects. Normally rivals, they are collaborating because they are all seeking answers to the same question – how to design for the opportunities and risks posed by the shift towards much higher density housing.

The practices have compared notes on their work in progress, first to propose and define a new 'superdensity' threshold of 150 homes to the hectare. They have also pooled knowledge to assess how this threshold is being crossed with schemes of even higher density: these schemes reach levels of density which, despite 120 years' experience in housing collectively, these practices have rarely encountered.

Why is it important to review designing for superdensity? Because 150 homes per hectare is approximately the same as Westminster City Council's red light of 500 habitable rooms per hectare, a density at which applications were taken to the housing minister for specialist advice and attention. But there is no current guidance for applicants even though superdense schemes require a more rigorous approach to procurement, design and management. There is already some excellent work on management, which this document aims to extend to design and planning. It has been completed in partnership with Design for Homes, which has previously published consumer research into the raw nerves exposed by the relationship of density and design.

Why make recommendations?

Planning authorities emphasise streetscape and aesthetics when considering superdensity proposals, with less thought given to the quality of life the housing could sustain, and therefore the long-term sustainability of the housing itself. We believe the balance has to be restruck.

The industry as a whole - designers, developers, clients and statutory authorities - are caught in a design framework and business model which produce superdense developments which are unlikely to prove satisfactory in the long term. We believe that there should be enhanced standards of design and management for homes at superdensity, which will in turn have an impact on the business models used.

Our aim

To provide guidance for members and officers for judging the success of new housing development in the long term, especially for schemes in the 30 London boroughs where the GLA is without statutory authority to advise and intervene. The partners behind the publication have jointly gathered evidence for how to make higher density less of a risk. We are very grateful to NHBC,the standards setting body for homebuilding in the UK, for its support in helping to disseminate recommendations for avoiding such risk to a wide audience.

Superdensity is the consequence of the successful compact city. The challenge is to design the housing appropriately so it is has long-term appeal.

DESIGN FOR HOMES

HTA

Levitt Bernstein

PRP

PTEa POLLARD THOMAS EDWARDS architects

Superdensity

The drive toward higher density homes for all households

London has to accommodate huge growth in its population, some 800 000 by 2016. Additional new homes are needed at a rate of more than 31 000 a year to give the city a chance of housing them. This is driving density.

Densities of up to 200 habitable rooms per acre, or 150 homes per hectare, had been the ceiling in Inner London since the end of the second world war. Many older Victorian and Edwardian London neighbourhoods operate successfully just below these densities, and more recent developments such as Lillington Street or the Barbican, which were built slightly above these densities, have also thrived. But once PPG3 directed planning authorities to intensify development of urban sites, pressure to build at much higher density emerged and limits set within UDPs were waived.

Consider how much has changed. Westminster operated a density cap of 150 homes per hectare as the limit of the inhabitable. Applications breaching this had to go the housing minister and be reviewed by experts who looked for balancing features (the core of this report's 10 recommendations) to mitigate the effects such high density would have on life within the scheme, such as adjacent amenity or private outdoor space. This process happened with Odham's Walk, a good example of sustainable higher density at 154 homes to the hectare, where a breach of the UDP of less than 3% was accepted because the scheme had generous private and semi-private outdoor spaces and on-site management.

But today most commissions are to design schemes at densities at least a third higher than found at Odham's Walk, rising to three or more times its density. By pooling what we can see on our drawing boards, it is possible to chart a range for these developments' densities - 150 to 500 homes to the hectare, which we call "Superdensity". The group believe that only schemes of more than 50 dwellings in size need to address the management and design issues raised by superdensity so carefully.

Our approach

At the same time as density has soared, so has the need to accommodate families within these schemes. This pressure stems from two sources: first, from concerns about the long-term sustainability of large schemes containing only small apartments, and second, from the demand for affordable family housing in London.

We aim to define the factors for success in the provision of very high-density housing in London for both families and non-families. No distinction has been made between two-bedroom flats for private sale and two-bedroom flats for affordable rent. This is because a large proportion of such flats built for private sale end up in the private rented sector, even being let to tenants on benefit or itinerant workers. It has also been assumed that all two-bedroom flats need to be designed so that they can accommodate a household of four, such as two adults and two children.

To work out what would make a family home within a superdensity scheme satisfactory we have adopted a benchmark. A home with independent ground-floor access to the front, and a private garden at the rear, provides a universally accepted form of family housing, and one which also minimises the management requirements when used for renting. The exploration of approaches to superdensity family housing has therefore been based on an examination of the advantages and disadvantages of the various options in comparison with the benchmark – a home at ground floor level.

Superdensity's benefits and challenges

Benefits

Urban Renaissance thinking has it that urban intensification is more sustainable than simply adding to London's perimeter, and urban policy in London is partly about securing its future as a world capital by supporting the accommodation needs of an expanding workforce. Higher densities support the capital's drive in three ways:

- In social terms, because it encourages mixed communities, enhancing social capital and reducing social isolation
- In economic terms, because it brings economies of scale in services and markets and
- In environmental terms, owing to a reduced carbon footprint.

Challenges

But there are considerations that may work against the advantages of urban intensification, unless measures are taken to mitigate them:

- In dense developments, even where external open space and other amenities and services are locally available, the effort involved in using those amenities, and the difficulty of supervising children using them, make their use less likely.
- Some family members will spend more time in their homes, tend to do more indoors and therefore place heavier demands on the living environment than they would in our benchmark home with direct access to the ground. Other family members, teenagers in particular, will spend more time away from the home with increasingly occasional visits.

- There will be increased pressure on communal circulation spaces as more family members, and children in particular, make use of stairways, lifts, lobbies and corridors.

- Intensity of use and closer proximity places pressure on acoustic and visual privacy, in direct proportion to increases in density.

- Some services will benefit from economies of scale (security measures for example), but others will cost more as a consequence of increased use (such as play facilities).

- Large tall buildings have unique environmental impacts. For instance, it is more difficult to provide high quality amenity space with a satisfactory microclimate at the base of tall buildings. Downdrafts, shadow and the risk of falling objects are problems but solutions are available.

- Provision for cars creates a notoriously thorny problem. If parking space is to be provided on site, its provision often limits density itself, as the development budget, or indeed the site capacity, is used up.

- Most vitally, superdensity schemes rely on high quality management for their enduring success. The relationship between management, design, and the procurement and approvals process is a core theme behind our thinking. Although much of the resistance to very high densities owes its origins to negative experience of poorly managed 1960s' council estates, there is little evidence of a move to impose higher standards of management as a prerequisite for approving new schemes.

Odham's Walk, developed above Westminster's density cap, but an urban oasis 25 years on

Recommendations and regulation

Superdensity schemes fall outside the parameters of the current regulatory framework. There is widespread acceptance that schemes at superdensities call for high quality design. Indeed, design quality is often invoked as a prerequisite for permitting schemes that breach previously accepted norms. But in some cases the focus appears to be on aesthetic, contextual or stylistic considerations rather than aspects of design that might impact more directly on the quality of life for families living at super densities.

Over the following pages this publication makes 10 recommendations for living at superdensity, even emphasising the role of the procurement authority. But we are cautious about calling for standards. We recognise that the development industry struggles with contradictory legislation and overzealous application of standards can produce undesirable consequences. It is clear that further guidance is required, but it is for others to decide whether this should be made mandatory. If it is, it has to be undertaken within the context of a review of other requirements to provide clarity for the industry.

Building on existing work

There is some very useful work by others on which we have drawn, although there is nothing that specifically tackles superdensity. Four documents are particularly relevant:

1. *Housing Space Standards*, HATC et al. (2006): a report for the GLA as part of the review of the 2006 London Plan

2. *Delivering Successful Higher-Density Housing:* a toolkit, East Thames Housing Group (2006)

3. *Perceptions of Privacy and Density in Housing,* Design for Homes Popular Research (2003)

4. *Higher Density Housing for Families,* London Housing Federation (2004)

Each of these includes references that lead into a substantial body of supporting guidance published by the Housing Corporation, CABE, Communities and Local Government and its predecessor departments. This report is structured as a companion guide to these documents.

Tabard Square, Borough

Superdensity

10 recommendations

1. Neighbourhood context
2. Balanced communities
3. Making flats work for families
4. Management
5. Organising and accessing flats
6. Privacy
7. Outdoor space and the public realm
8. Environmental sustainability
9. The role of local authorities in procurement
10. Meeting the cost of service charges

Superdensity

1: Neighbourhood Context

Greenwich Millennium Village, where scale and density kickstarted regeneration

New developments should be regarded as an opportunity to create benefits for the wider community.

Excellent local amenity

Superdensity developments both justify and require very high standards of local amenity in close proximity, including healthcare, local retail, post office and telecoms, banking, education at the pre-school stage and beyond, play, parks and open space, public transport, access to commercial centres, sports facilities and leisure and entertainment centres.

A positive approach

Superdensity schemes can transform the wider neighbourhood being of a scale which cannot underwrite benefits for the wider community. But creating an appropriate context for superdensity schemes requires a thorough placemaking approach. Placemaking is the process that brings together local stakeholders with a wide range of professional disciplines to create a successfully animated mixed-use environment which is sustainable in social, economic and environmental terms.

Composition of the development team always gives some clues as to how serious an applicant is about placemaking, which ought to be clearly evident from the earliest project stages and in the procurement and design process. Project evaluation and approval should be on a broad enough range of criteria to pick up evidence of successful placemaking. Building for Life (www.buildingforlife.org), a successful joint venture between design watchdog CABE and the Home Builders Federation (and managed by Design for Homes) is a useful evaluation tool. For large superdensity schemes, the aspiration should be to achieve Gold Standard under this scheme.

Density can bring old buildings back to life, such as this brewery revived at Putney Wharf

St George's Charter Quay where the quality of the public realm attracts non-residents

Key recommendations

- Consideration of context for superdensity schemes must be the primary issue for determining appropriateness of such development in any given location. The recommendations provided by East Thames are an excellent guide.
- Large schemes should be used to provide the critical mass or economy of scale to make good deficiencies either on-site or off-site where locations fail to meet the necessary requirements.
- It is also important to recognise the potentially transformative effect of high quality, high density development. The social and economic case should be given greater weight and must be established in order to be able to justify the mix, size and appropriateness of a development. These must be considered alongside "context" which is used as a pretext for constraining developments on the grounds of scale and massing.
- Larger superdensity schemes should be seen as potential opportunities for a step change in urban intensification of appropriate locations. All too often opportunities to kick-start an appropriate local increase in plot ratio are missed when key sites are developed at low densities that in hindsight appear to be of inadequate scale. The contrast between early and more recent phases of London Docklands is a case in point.
- A 'placemaking' approach should be taken to the creation of superdensity schemes. Processes should be employed that bring together local stakeholders with developers and their professional advisers to create a shared vision of an animated environment in which mixed communities can successfully thrive.
- Make good use of established tools for establishing a holistic understanding of appropriate context for superdensity schemes: e.g. Building for Life, Housing Corporation Sustainability Toolkit, Housing Quality Indicators.

Superdensity

2: Balanced Communities

Many of London's most vivacious quarters combine a mix of dwelling sizes, housing type, income range and tenure.

When superdensity lacks balance

Many new developments have provided for disadvantaged people at one extreme and relatively affluent people at the other: middle-income families are the missing element and they are so often a key part of any community. This failure to achieve balance is related to the failure to create homes that will attract middle income families.

Long-term demands are for bigger dwellings and with increasing disposable incomes, undersized units may in future become unpopular with both owners and tenants (although this trend may be moderated by the rising cost of land and construction). Buildings with only small and undersized dwellings may become accommodation of last resort and even the slums of the future.

Many recent superdensity schemes have provided a mix of one and two-bedroom units, some very small. The rationale may have been that this would ease their management, by excluding large families (and therefore reduce the number of children), and avoid the need to set aside land for open space. Smaller dwellings are also more affordable which favours planning approval, rapid sale, and increases land value. But given the need to create balanced communities, this is not a formula for long-term social sustainability.

The following are key pointers to understanding appropriate mix of size and tenure for schemes in general, but many seem to be ignored on superdensity schemes:

- There is a shortage of larger dwellings. The Home Builders Federation indicates that contrary to perceived wisdom, there is a shortage of larger homes, partly caused by the natural desire of older couples to stay within their present, under-occupied homes. It is also a fact that people will generally occupy the maximum space that they can afford (Home Alone: the house preferences of one-person households). Small dwellings may mean fewer middle-income residents.
- Most new homes in London are flats. Only 15% of new homes in London are houses (Housing Statistics 2005).

- Most new flats are small. Of the flats built in England 97.5% are one or two-bedroom units (Housing Statistics 2005). Private units tend to be smaller than affordable dwellings.

- Long-term demand is likely to be for larger dwellings. In Room to Move? Household Formation, Tenure and Housing Consumption, Prof David King and his collaborators show that future demand is likely to be for larger dwellings. John Stewart, in Room to Move? The Wrong Kind of Housing?, develops the implications to suggest that a shortage of larger homes will drive up relative prices between large and small dwellings, exacerbating social polarisation because the less well off will be unable to afford large homes. Prof King concludes that if account is taken of the housing trends of the over-45s, and if the younger owner-occupier households continue to increase their room consumption into the future at the same rate that they increased in 1991-2001, the net increase in owner-occupied dwellings will need to be almost entirely focussed on large dwellings.

- Mixed tenure and mixed incomes. The recently published PPS3 is explicit about the need to create communities with a mix of incomes, stating that 'key characteristics of a mixed community are a variety of housing, particularly in terms of tenure and price, and a mix of different households such as families with children, single person households and older people' (paragraph 20). 2003's Sustainable Communities Plan intends to provide 'a well integrated mix of decent homes of different types and tenures'. This is perceived to be a way of regenerating existing low-income neighbourhoods and so of leading to sustainability and social inclusion.

Child density is an issue, often made worse if there are no dedicated play areas

Scope of Recommendations

The following recommendations on mix and tenure should apply to all housing tenures because in the long term initial tenures do change (although affordable housing section 106 agreements generally require the tenure to remain in perpetuity). The advent of large blocks with multiple owners, each with separate management regimes, could result in poor overall management, requiring intervention by local authorities. The likelihood of this outcome is supported by recent history: in the 1960s local authorities bought up large swathes of poorly managed private housing (although more recently council housing has been sold).

Superdensity housing is unlikely to be able to provide a proportionate share of the number of larger dwellings that research suggests may be required. But it more easily makes a contribution to the need for all tenure groups. This will encourage stability in both the rented and owner occupied sectors and encourage higher income families to take up residence because of the access offered to the larger homes they desire. Individual houses on lower density sites are the first preference for families and they may have to meet the bulk of future need.

Key recommendations

- Provide some large dwellings unless the location is unsuitable. Whenever there are adequate amenities then a significant proportion of the provision should be for family dwellings of three or more bedrooms.

- The GLA should encourage Boroughs to calculate the percentage of affordable housing required by the Mayor in terms of floorspace, rather than by the number of dwellings, in order to encourage more large homes.

- The tenure mix should meet the local planning requirements and local housing need.

- Keep child densities within acceptable levels.

- Take cognisance of the background of many new tenants, who are from overseas and are not familiar with British housing norms when considering design and management.

- Larger dwellings for high-income households can be located and designed according to market considerations.

- Make the general appearance and physical access to different tenure groups as identical as possible, although some differences are acceptable to meet market considerations when very high-value sale housing is being provided. Pepper-potting by staircase is acceptable.

Superdensity

3: Making Flats Work for Families

Houses tend to have more appeal than flats, especially to families with children, but there are ways of replicating the benefits of houses in other dwelling forms.

Housing types for families

Given a choice, most families in Britain have preferred to live in a house. Houses have direct access to private outdoor space such as gardens and also empty on to the street where there are opportunities for neighbourliness without enforced sharing of facilities. Houses can comfortably adapt to suit all sorts of households across the spectrum of income, age and ethnicity.

Densities of up to about 120 homes per hectare can be achieved readily using urban house types. Houses can also play a part in superdensity schemes if coupled with larger apartment blocks.

However, the main focus of this report is the assumption that housing families in flats is, and will remain, a necessary consequence of pressure on land. The challenge for the designer and manager is to mitigate the downside of flat-dwelling for families. Here are some suggestions:

A ground floor flat or maisonette with a private garden, and possibly a front door to the street, captures some of the advantages of a house. Maisonettes (or duplexes) can offer a useful alternative. Given the pressure on ground floor space to provide main entrances, stores and commercial uses (in mixed developments) there is often limited floorspace for ground floor family flats. However, the available floorspace can be doubled if it is arranged as maisonettes, with first floor or lower ground level bedrooms. Top level flats, although highly dependent on lifts, often benefit from generous private terraces as a consequence of planning setbacks and can therefore offer good outdoor space to families. The provision of private outdoor space is an essential component in making homes in superdensity developments attractive to families.

Designing flats for families

Key Reference

House Space Standards was produced as a report for the GLA as part of the review of the London Plan in 2006 by HATC working with others. It suggested enhancements to apartment layout and design to take account of superdensity living, some of which are referenced here:

Supporting family life at maximum occupancy

The 'usefulness' of habitable rooms is more relevant than overall dwelling size, and space should relate to occupancy, not number of bedrooms.

Minimum sizes can be derived for living/eating/cooking areas, sleeping areas and storage, using the 'functionally' based approach of Standards and Quality in Design (see the House Space Standards report for GLA) . The report provides additional rules for room proportion and individual room sizes. Guidance is given on minimum dwelling areas required to achieve the requisite functions in a well designed dwelling.

Space standards for bathrooms and circulation spaces are already covered by Part M and Lifetime Homes.

Utility space

In superdensity housing schemes where dwellings are remote from the ground, recycling and the washing and drying of clothes need special consideration. The kitchen component of the living/eating/cooking area allows for segregated recycling and a washer/drier which should ideally be outside the kitchen (in larger dwellings in a utility room) especially when this is part of, or connected to, an open-plan living area.

Providing for hospitality

There should be space in living/eating areas to provide hospitality to visitors when all family members are at home.

Storage

There should be space to store a wide variety of household and personal items, dispersed in convenient locations. Extra provision should be made for above-ground homes without outside storage.

HATC's report for GLA does not differentiate between houses which could have a garden shed and homes above ground. While giving storage space per person it does not give guidance on how it could be spread between different places. There needs to be a balance between shared spaces and private storage space.

Allowing for family members to be alone

There needs to be a good balance between shared, social spaces where people can do things together, and private spaces where people can do things alone.

HATC gives fairly generous and flexible minimum sleeping areas, but in a fully occupied two- bedroom, four-person dwelling there are no habitable rooms which aren't shared. In larger family homes especially, there is a stronger likelihood of more than one family member needing personal space. A solution would be to offer a proportion of four-person homes with three bedrooms and to ensure that no homes have more than two shared bedrooms.

Inner-city neighbourhoods may lack appropriate places for teenagers to find the privacy they need, or in which to study, which would be available in less dense environments. Even single bedrooms should be large enough to accommodate a bed, storage and a desk as well as space for a visitor. This makes the single bedroom dimensioned at 7 square metres (or 6.5) inadequate.

Flexibility

Some flexibility is required as to how spaces can be used to suit changing needs and circumstances.

HATC's study sets out to allow enough space in living/eating/cooking areas for these to be configured as separate spaces. Separate kitchen/diners will be desirable for affordable three-bedroom homes and larger. Providing for single bedrooms (as above) would provide extra flexibility too: such single rooms could provide a study or playroom or be knocked through to an adjoining room.

Accessibility

Enough space and facilities are required to allow a member of the family to remain at home if they have temporary or permanent illness or incapacity, and to offer hospitality to a visitor in a wheelchair. Requiring all homes to comply with internal Lifetime Homes standards should satisfy this principle.

Key recommendations

- The house is the most successful and proven type of home for families, especially those eligible for affordable tenure. Wherever possible houses should be incorporated, even into superdensity schemes.
- Private open space is highly valued and should be provided for all homes of whatever dwelling tenure or type – houses, flats or maisonettes. The space provided must be safe enough for children and large enough for the entire family to sit out, and should receive direct sunlight for some part of the day.
- Some advantages of houses can be designed into ground-floor flats and maisonettes.
- Flats or maisonettes at roof level with large terraces can also provide excellent family homes.
- HATC's recommendations on dimensions are to be encouraged but with the addition of a separate utility space of at least 1 square metre per person for all family dwellings which don't have private garden space with external storage.
- Half of all five-person or larger affordable dwellings should have a separate kitchen/dining room.
- Half of four-person affordable dwellings should have three bedrooms, and no affordable dwellings should have more than two double bedrooms.
- Single bedrooms should be demonstrably suitable for study and recreation by older children, and large enough to allow occupants to entertain visitors. It is not possible to allow for all of these activities in a room smaller than 8.5 square metres.
- A separate utility area should be provided for washing and drying clothes away from eating/cooking spaces.

Superdensity

4: Management

Superdensity intensifies pressure on management, so preparing the ground for clear practice and protocol is fundamental.

Why is management important?

New developments must have robust management structures that deliver a secure, supportive and safe environment for residents. They must provide for cleaning of common parts, collection of service charges rents and ensure enforcement of conditions of leases. They should help people to settle in and cope with new conditions.

Historically, management has often been under-funded. Steps must be taken at the inception of superdensity developments to ensure that adequately funded and well ordered management will be provided. Provision must be made for residents to have an ongoing say so that they can influence policy in response to changing circumstances. There has to be a legally binding management plan.

Good guidance is provided in Delivering Successful Higher-Density Housing: a toolkit, published by the East Thames Housing Group.

Planning for good management

Simple prescriptions are unhelpful because of the complexity of the issues, but it is possible to set out a few key requirements which should be incorporated in all new superdensity developments. Compliance should be achieved by the developer entering into a legally binding agreement, preferably with the local authority at planning stage through the Section 106. Such agreements must be detailed if they are to be effective. Future managing agents must be party to the agreement and contribute to drawing up its terms.

Key points which should be incorporated in such an agreement are set out below. They have been drawn up for schemes which have a mix of socially rented and private dwellings, but the requirements are still necessary where there are only private dwellings. European models are helpful.

Obligations should be placed initially on the developer, which successive freeholders will then inherit, to ensure that there is a viable management framework for selling, letting and managing all dwellings and other non-housing uses. The freeholder should be required to consult all residents regularly on management issues. The landlord of socially rented dwellings could act as an intermediary, but the freeholder needs to have a direct relationship with tenants of privately owned accommodation.

Our recommendations set out the legal obligations that we believe should be placed on developers at the planning stage, and which will bind future freeholders, to foster successful ongoing management.

Affordability

Rent and service charges can be very high in superdense developments because of the cost of managing and maintaining complex buildings. Service charges in particular can be very high. The cost of both rents and service charges must be considered together and kept within accepted affordability limits for low cost accommodation. This will have an impact on land values.

Management of refuse and recycling needs enhanced solutions at higher density

Key recommendations:

- There has to be a Management Plan, for which the freeholder is responsible, which specifies how the landlord(s) will manage the development.
- Where there is more than one landlord there must be simple and robust arrangements for coordinating management and maintenance of parts of the building where there will be overlapping impact.
- The plan should acknowledge that there may be residents of individual private landlords and should provide a means of communicating with them and ensuring that they are aware of their rights and obligations under the agreement.
- The plan must demonstrate that satisfactory levels of security can be achieved, and include measures to address antisocial behaviour by individual residents.
- The plan should set out the anticipated initial rents and ground rent, service or any other charges, and the process by which these will be changed in the future. These must be demonstrably affordable to the anticipated residents.
- The freeholder should have an obligation to consult with all tenants (of private in addition to social landlords) who have a tenancy that exceeds three months, on management matters.
- There must be an Allocation Plan for first lettings where a local authority or RSL has nomination rights to ensure a balanced intake of households. This should specify targets on issues such as child densities, household types, under-letting, whether households are economically active and tenancy history.
- There should be a Maintenance Plan which sets out objectives and standards. The standards should specify the quality of the works and method of response to reports of failure, as well as the frequency and scope of cyclical works.
- The Maintenance Plan should specify how replacement and maintenance works will be funded and the charge that the freeholder or landlord will make to procure and manage them.
- There should be a schedule of the amenities to which the residents will have access. Where there is a charge or residents are liable for the cost of their upkeep, the initial charges should be stated, together with a description of how those charges will be decided in the future.
- It is recommended that residents be given the opportunity to manage and maintain communal facilities through a funded arrangement, such as the establishment of a Community Development Trust with adequate financial resources.
- There should be a forum to discuss management, and changes in procedures and obligations, to which all residents (including those of private landlords) are invited. This should take account of third party interests, for instance where a Section 106 Agreement has been entered into with the local authority.

Superdensity

5: Organising and Accessing Flats

Shared halls and corridors bring their own set of design and management criteria to underpin success.

Alternative ways to organise flats

These are the three common ways of arranging apartments:

Corridor access

In superdensity schemes this usually means double-banked corridors with all flats being single aspect, except on corners. The longer the corridor, the more cost/space-efficient the layout, because all can be served off one main core plus an escape stair.

This may be acceptable where the orientation of the block avoids a north-only outlook, and views from either side are not compromised. Long corridors can be improved by daylight and view at each end and by good quality interior design and lighting. However, the practical and psychological disadvantages of single-aspect flats and long corridors are obvious. Some of the worst post-war social housing blocks adopted this arrangement.

In high density flat planning, efficient use of frontage is key. Therefore flats in corridor schemes invariably have internal bathrooms and usually internal kitchens as well.

Deck access

Deck access is common across all tenures in much of Europe, but in Britain it is associated with post-war social housing. Its associations have only recently been refreshed, at least in some quarters, with the more positive image of loft apartments and live-work space on former industrial sites.

It is a very efficient and cost-effective arrangement, which works particularly well in giving all flats the best primary outlook (such as over a canal or park or landscaped courtyard). The downside is the lack of visual and acoustic privacy on the deck-side, which makes it best suited to non-habitable rooms. Good detailed design can mitigate this effect, for example by pulling the deck away from the building and bridging over to front doors; by using sound absorbent and light reflective finishes; and by allowing generous space for 'colonisation' by residents and plants.

Deck access can be successfully combined with maisonettes. Decks are only required at every alternate floor. Given improved modern technical standards, especially with regard to noise, this arrangement can create good high density family housing.

Core access

Grouping between four and eight flats around a single core makes good use of lifts and allows at least some homes to be dual aspect. It also tends to be more space efficient (in net-gross floorspace) than double-banked corridors. Well designed cores can be easier to manage and more secure than corridor or deck arrangements.

This core access model is generally the most successful.

Design of shared access

Numbers of people using a shared hall is more important than density. The report published by the London Housing Federation, Higher Density Housing for Families (2004), sets out acceptable solutions for access via common circulation to flats and maisonettes, based on a sliding scale as density increases. It points out that, as far as common circulation is concerned, it is not the density itself that is the determining factor, but rather the number of people served by each separate stair and lift core. As the density increases buildings get taller, lifts become a necessity and, even if flats are grouped around as many separate cores as possible (within limits set by the need to reduce the number of lifts and so keep service charges to a minimum), there is an inevitable rise in the number of dwellings accessed from each core.

Extra facilities for core access flats at superdensity

While it was recognised in 2004 that rising densities were becoming a design problem, much of that study was devoted to schemes within the then accepted norm, in a range from four storeys and upwards. This meant that 20 to 25 dwellings were sharing a single core. Beyond this limit, as numbers of flats and storeys increased, it was felt that a whole range of extra facilities, such as more internal space, larger balconies and ground floor bicycle stores, would be needed if families at upper levels were to be satisfactorily accommodated in the long term.

Security in superdensity schemes

In cores containing affordable dwellings for rent with more than 20 to 25 dwellings, the security of common parts (entrance lobbies, lifts, stairs and corridors) cannot be guaranteed simply by the provision of door entry systems, with or without remote CCTV. Additional security can be provided by means of separate secondary security doors at each landing, but this does not prevent uninvited non-residents from vandalising lifts, stairs or entrance lobbies. The only dependable method of achieving the security of common parts above those numbers appears to be some sort of full or part-time concierge. The implications are potentially large and onerous, as full-time concierge schemes need to involve the management of several hundred dwellings to reduce service charges to acceptable levels.

Local authorities experimented with a single concierge serving more than one core, and in some cases different buildings altogether, but most of these experiments have been unsuccessful. There appeared to be no substitute for an actual 'person behind a desk' at each core to successfully monitor comings and goings. But with the recent considerable improvement in door-control mechanisms and remote CCTV technology, notable successes have been achieved both by local authorities and housing associations, such as the Abbott's Wharf scheme in Poplar developed by East Thames and Telford Homes.

Currently some developments are having success with providing a concierge at peak times, supported by random visits by caretakers at other times. Others make it pay by including a facility such as a gym within the block where members sign in with the concierge so that the concierge's costs are in part carried by gym membership. One other model is to use parts of a development as an apartment hotel where onsite staff, almost comparable with hotel concierges, would be expected during the 24-hour cycle.

Where there are small isolated blocks with one core serving more than 25 dwellings then it will be uneconomic to provide a concierge. In these cases supervision should be provided from a local base, which presupposes that the manager has other stock nearby.

Access deck set back from building lines helps privacy

Key recommendations

- Methods of organising and accessing flats are critical, and become more so in proportion to increasing densities. Core access serving a limited number of homes has proven to be successful. Deck access is being evaluated favourably as a viable alternative, particularly when employed with maisonettes.
- Corridor access offers inherent efficiencies, but long double-banked corridors tend to create a bleak environment and to be very difficult to manage for families.
- The provision of cycle stores and other amenities must be taken into account.
- Security of shared areas must be considered at the earliest design stage, and the ongoing costs should be incorporated into the business plan.
- Secure door entry systems are adequate to protect common circulation where 25 or fewer dwellings share a single entrance point.
- Entrance cores serving more than 25 dwellings should ideally each have their own concierge. If they cannot, remote control of access can be considered based on successful schemes, taking account of the social mix of residents, layout of the development and the technology employed. It will require a personal presence close by.
- For small isolated blocks with more than 25 dwellings per core, management support close by, with regular inspections may be sufficient.

Superdensity

6: Privacy

When it comes to privacy issues, noise has overtaken the visual as demanding most care in layout and construction.

Visual privacy

Measures to stop people in one new home seeing into another are enshrined in local planning policy. The best known is for a minimum distance for separation of 22 metres between windows in principal rooms such as bedrooms and living rooms. This metric conversion of 70ft originated early in the last century as the distance at which an accidental glimpse of nudity would be blurred enough to protect standards of decency.

Acoustic privacy

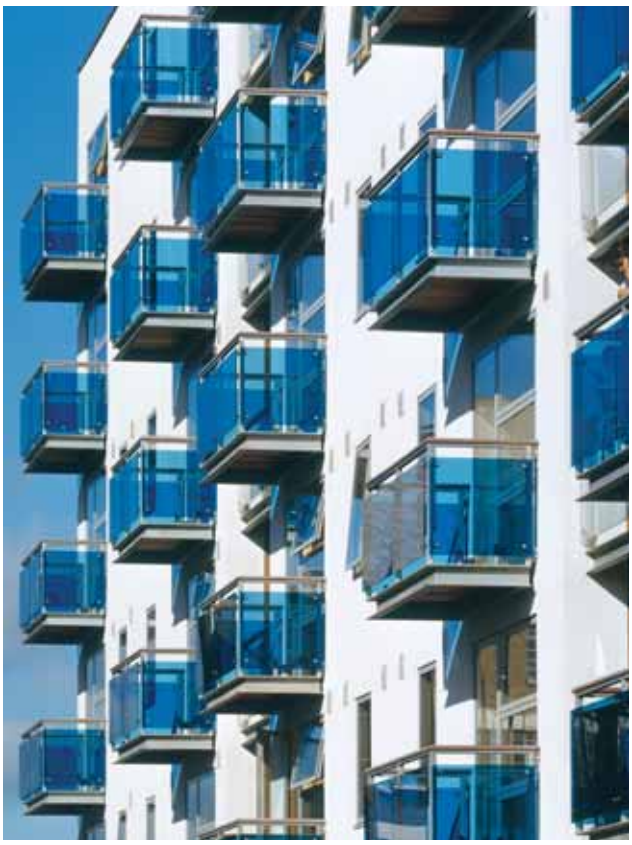
Recent research suggests that privacy is now predominantly an acoustic issue rather than a visual one (Perceptions of Privacy and Density in Housing, Design for Homes Popular Housing Research (2004)). People fear being overheard and do not want their private conversations relayed to the neighbour. But people also suffer badly from invasive noise. This may be because stress is caused by factors beyond our control. To stop being seen in our home, there are options: rearrange furniture, buy blinds or nets or screen the windows with planting. But noise can be relentless, whether from a road or flight-path or any venue for socialising which can be antisocial to those living around it. The position and type of windows should address such risks.

The fabric of housing has become an issue in homes built at all densities - a party wall in a rural semi-detached is at least as good a conductor of noise as a party wall in an apartment block where more attention will have been paid to noise as a risk. High performance audio and home cinemas, 24-hour broadcasting, loud computer games and the domestic washing machine means that the average home generates noise of an intensity and type never anticipated. Unfortunately our ability to generate noise has significantly raced ahead of our ability to soundproof.

Ensuring acoustic privacy

Invasive noise is not well policed by the Building Regulations' modest targets for sound reduction. Many developers building for niche markets build well above the regulatory targets on the grounds that a higher construction cost is cheaper than managing disgruntled buyers. Heavy building systems tend to be preferred over lightweight ones for dealing with sound, but no construction system is inherently better, despite arguments made for heavier construction. Research shows that parts of Greenwich's Millennium Village built in timber-frame are highly rated by their occupants for their lack of sound transmission, whereas in well-documented cases residents have sued housebuilders over noise in concrete-frame apartments. It is inevitably down to site practice with site labour either doing or not doing what they should. However, layout also plays a part. The success of Greenwich's Millennium Village can be attributed in part to the internal plans which avoid putting a bedroom on one side of a party wall next to a living room on the other. The plans also use circulation areas to act as a sound buffer between the areas where sound transmission would be an issue. This is the practice in the average London townhouse.

Layouts also affect how noise travels between dwellings via the windows. Put two units side by side with bedroom windows a couple of feet apart and when both windows are open, the properties are effectively linked and privacy compromised.



Outdoor space is much valued at higher density, but more so when as private as possible

Distances between windows can be relaxed with irregular windows or opaque glass

Ensuring visual privacy

Research into privacy also shows that residents worry as much about people seeing how they live as they do about being seen themselves indoors. This may well reflect fear of encouraging theft but there is some evidence that the lack of storage is leading to impromptu solutions that embarrass people. One startling finding is the extent to which people value complete privacy in a private outdoor space, perhaps somewhere to eat breakfast, sunbathe or practice a golf swing without scrutiny. The desire to protect against glimpses of these alfresco moments were more strongly expressed than comments made about being glimpsed in the home.

Key recommendations

- Better sound proofing is needed at higher densities
- Internal plans should separate areas where sound transmission between different generations in a household cause problems
- Outdoor space should be as private as possible
- Design of mixed-use developments should seek to minimise noise disturbance to residents

Superdensity

7: Outdoor Space and the Public Realm

Pedestrian routes work best when routed past commercial premises with active frontages

The quality of planning and design of spaces around new homes will affect both their appeal and their safety as a place to live.

Urban design

Superdensity schemes demand especially careful evaluation of the urban design approach. On the one hand, many of the current orthodoxies routinely applied by local authority planning and urban design officers do not apply. On the other hand, superdensity schemes place an increased onus upon clarity of design, urban legibility and the siting of blocks.

Public and private domain

The overriding consideration should be clarity as to the distinction between public and private domain. In many instances, superdensity schemes will occupy an entire urban block and the most straightforward approach is to provide a secure perimeter, impervious to public access. In some schemes, mixed uses occupy the ground or lower storeys. Spaces such as arcades, malls or open piazzas should be animated with active mixed-use frontages.

Integrated three-dimensional design of service and amenity

In any event, urban design at these densities requires thinking at a properly civic scale. It is a common failing not to appreciate that at densities beyond 150 homes per hectare, solutions for access, servicing, parking, amenity and so on have to be tackled as part of an integrated building design, and very much in three dimensions. At very high densities it is not as easy to provide for all these things on the ground plane, as it would be in the case of housing at lesser, more conventional densities. To attempt to do so is to risk a very negative experience of schemes at ground level, cluttering amenity space with parked cars, and giving the ground storey over to service and storage uses that do not contribute to an active and interesting street frontage.

Environmental impact on external amenity

In superdensity schemes built form needs to be carefully manipulated to take account of:

- Daylight and sunlight - minimising areas in permanent shade. The Building Research Establishment (BRE) publication, Site Layout Planning for Daylight and Sunlight (1991), provides methods and guidelines for judging acceptability of proposed schemes. The BRE also provides methods and guidelines for the calculation of light levels within rooms.
- Wind - mitigating downdraft and turbulence. Often wind tunnel testing will be required to predict performance. It is often appropriate to construct deflecting canopies, or to step sheer elevations near to the ground.
- Falling objects - a psychological and sometimes real barrier to the use of the public realm immediately adjacent to tall facades. Measures similar to those required to mitigate wind can assist. Detailing needs to be sufficiently robust and easy to maintain.
- Provision for play - it is often quite difficult to achieve NPFA standards on site owing to conflicts with habitable space. In many cases only on-site private toddlers' play areas can be provided and larger public play provision (LEAPS and NEAPS) has to be provided off site.

Microclimate, landscape and ecology

Very high plot ratios put pressure on the availability of usable outdoor space. At the same time, the siting, scale and orientation of very large buildings have considerable impact on the microclimate of surrounding space. Careful analysis is required to demonstrate that people will be able to enjoy comfortable conditions, and that an appropriate habitat will be provided for plant species to flourish. Landscape design is seriously constrained by such considerations. Designs should be supported by evidence that climatic conditions have been taken into account.

Species should be selected, and materials specified in the full knowledge and understanding of the conditions that will prevail: generally intensive usage, abrasion and wear in addition to aspects of micro-climate described above.

Car parking

Separate, secure garaging

It is seldom possible to accommodate any significant ratios of surface car parking in superdensity schemes. If provided in any numbers, parking should, if possible, be accommodated in communal garaging (basement, podium or separate garages). Stacking and automated machinery reduces the space requirement at additional cost. Management plays an important part in the success of such provision. In some continental schemes, such as Vauban in Freiburg, residents are incentivised to convert parking provision to amenity space and park cars remotely.

On-street and visitors' parking

In a properly designed masterplan where the street network responds appropriately to patterns of movement, on-street parking enlivens the streetscape with the comings and goings of people leaving and collecting their cars. The increased activity enhances passive supervision. The parked cars are in turn supervised by passers-by. Superdensity schemes are enhanced by an appropriate degree of on-street parking. However, this could never be adequate to meet the parking needs of most developments of this kind, although it is the most efficient way of dealing with visitors' parking.

Key recommendations:

- Superdensity schemes should always be viewed in the context of a masterplan framework, extending well outside the boundaries of the development site itself.
- Such masterplans should be created in accordance with best practice advice available from CABE and other sources.
- Avoid the common trap of trying to relate the design of superdensity schemes to guidance intended for much lower densities. For example, Manual for Streets is intended to assist in the consideration of the design of pavements and streets to be adopted by the local authority. Such guidance does not necessarily work well when related to provision for movement within superdensity schemes.
- In many cases, movement of people and vehicles around superdensity schemes, provision for parking, servicing and so on, will need to be organised in three dimensions as part of the building design. For example, podia will often be used for parking, shared storage and refuse beneath, with private open space, shared amenity space, and pedestrian access above.
- The potential success of such arrangements needs to be understood not only in terms of the quality of the architectural design, but also – and essentially – in relation to robust management that demonstrably guarantees long-term effectiveness.
- Intensity of use of the public realm or shared space requires location-specific design and quality or materials that may mean adoption by the local authority is not a realistic option.
- Superdensity schemes place a premium on the effective provision of public, communal and private amenity space in relation to schemes.
- It is essential to provide clear demarcation between the different categories of external space: public, private and semi-private.
- Different categories of external space should be carefully arranged in relation to each other to maintain privacy and to avoid conflict.
- Children's play must be adequately catered for, but will often need to be located off-site.
- Built form and massing needs to be organised carefully in relation to environmental impacts on external space including sunlight and daylight, microclimate, wind, and falling objects.
- Landscape design should demonstrate a clear consideration of all of the above factors and must use materials and plant species that are tolerant of abrasion and wear owing to intensity of use, as well as the particular conditions caused by close proximity to substantial built form.
- The potential success of landscape design is completely reliant on robust management arrangements that demonstrably guarantee long-term effectiveness.
- Private open space is highly valued and should be provided for all homes of whatever dwelling tenure or type – houses, flats or maisonettes. The space provided must be safe for children and large enough for the entire family to sit out, receive direct sunlight for some part of the day and be no less than 3 square metres in extent.
- Car parking ratios should be minimised; PTAL rating should be 4-6. A modal shift to sustainable means of transport should be encouraged. The relationship of the scheme to transport infrastructure is vital. Residents must feel safe walking or cycling and have easy access to public transport systems. Good practice includes innovative approaches such as the development of car clubs, car sharing and the use of residential travel plans. In these circumstances, parking ratios of much less than 1:1 are appropriate.
- Communal parking is essential to obviate excessive dominance of the public realm by motor cars. Great care is required in the design of key issues such as lighting, ventilation and security to avoid any negative impact of underground parking on superdensity schemes. Generally unallocated bays are the most efficient, reducing the need for spaces by up to 18%, according to a report by Alan Jones Consulting.
- Management schemes should be considered at the outset to enable the fair allocation of limited spaces and proper control of parking.

Superdensity

8: Environmental Sustainability

Higher density offers opportunity to make the most efficient methods of heating and lighting economic without the need for renewable technologies which impact on the shape or size of homes.

Introduction

Superdensity schemes allow the achievement of green standards at a lower cost than less dense developments because of their configuration, surface to volume ratio and generally large scale. Schemes should therefore be aspirational in the standards they seek to achieve.

This section touches on:

- Energy efficiency
- Renewable energy
- Embodied energy
- Transport and movement
- Waste management
- Water conservation
- Green/brown roofs

The Issues

Higher density developments offer greater opportunity to improve energy efficiency. (The use of renewable energy technologies will be required from April 2007 to meet the Code for Sustainable Homes.) Reduction in CO_2 emissions, through district and neighbourhood decentralised energy sources, such as Combined Cooling Heat and Power (CCHP) systems, are only feasible with a critical mass of dwellings. The use of Energy Services Companies (ESCOs) to support the implementation of low carbon energy technologies, with renewable sources of energy such as wind, solar or woodchip, can be more efficiently and economically utilised when there is a sufficient volume of development.

An integrated Energy Strategy for new projects should aim to minimise demand and integrate every aspect of energy use, from transport of people and goods to the design of the building itself. Life cycle costs, and consideration of embodied energy in choice of materials

and their eventual recycling, are relevant here. The future adaptability of the building for other uses, or for new types of occupancy, should be considered to extend the long-term life of the building.

The amount of daylight and sunlight entering buildings, and the spaces between them, depends on the form and orientation of the building, and the proximity, layout, shape and height of surrounding buildings. This has been discussed in section 4 of this report.

Innovative waste management strategies, such as underground vacuum waste and recycling systems, anaerobic digestion of waste and generation of biogas, are more viable at higher densities. While posing a challenge for both design and management, they have environmental and quality of life benefits.

Equally important is maintaining biodiversity and providing an opportunity for people living in urban areas to maintain contact with the changing seasons. Research has shown that a walk in the park reduces stress and tension, and that a view of landscape accelerates recovery from illness. High density development requires maximising opportunities for green open spaces. Green or brown roof technologies are becoming more reliable and acceptable, with the Mayor of London having produced a Living Roofs statement, which may eventually become policy, to promote roof terraces, roof gardens and green roofs across London.

Key recommendations

- There should be an energy strategy which takes advantage of the inherent opportunities available in superdensity developments to provide better than average performance.
- The strategy should seek to reduce energy costs to residents in order to offset high service charges.
- Buildings over eight storeys should include access to communal landscape space. This might be contained within the building, as atriums or 'winter gardens'. Alternatives might be large balconies, wintergardens within flats, or public open space within a ten-minute walk.
- Advantage should be taken of roofs in order to reduce water surcharge, and to provide biodiversity or amenity space.

Up to a point, sources of renewable energy can be incorporated into building fabric

Higher density brings the chance for improved public transport links to new build

- Sunlight: single aspect north-facing homes should be avoided. Wherever possible it is preferable to have at least one living space facing south.Dual aspect is highly desirable since it provides alternative views, varying light, the possibility of sunlight, through-ventilation, and public and private aspects.
- There should be daylight to all habitable rooms. Daylight factors should ideally satisfy BS 8206-2 Lighting for Buildings, but where this is not achievable the habitable room average daylight factor should be 0.5%
- Adaptability and flexibility in the layout of individual apartments should allow for different lifestyles and be easily adaptable for different uses.
- A Waste Management Strategy should consider how daily refuse and bulky goods are dealt with.
- There must be storage within flats for short term re-cycling, and communal storage and recycling bins outside flats, and space for disposal or holding of bulky household waste.
- A Management Strategy for deliveries which addresses home delivery supplies through provision of secure lockers at ground level or through a concierge.
- A Green Transport Plan to encourage the use of alternatives to the car, including provision of secure cycle and motorcycle parking and electric car charging points.
- Water conservation should be incorporated.

Superdensity

9: The Role of Local Authorities in Procurement

Civic leadership, such as Sir Howard Bernstein's of Manchester City Council, is key to new homebuilding

The planning authority has the best chance to encourage sustainable qualities in superdense development by identifying what is expected early in the process with the support of civic leadership.

The challenge

Large schemes, and in particular superdensity developments, will have an impact that goes well beyond their site and will have a lasting impact on the neighbourhood long after the developer has moved off the scene. The local authority is in a position to identify issues and give guidance on key issues, of which the developer is unlikely to be aware. The challenge for local authorities is to put themselves in a position where they can contribute to the evolution of these larger projects before the main planning, management and financial parameters are finalised.

A corollary is that the local authorities should have the technical skills to contribute positively.

Useful powers and publications

Circular 01/06, *Guidance on Changes to the Development Control System*, offers guidance on the subject matter to be covered in the Design and Access Statement required under The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004). This is a statement that must be submitted at outline and full planning permission stage for all applications. However the Circular is narrowly drawn in that it does not sufficiently acknowledge the need to identify the tenure and mix of dwellings and the post construction management plans for the development. The Circular does, however, allow Planning Authorities to add to the listed requirements and this opportunity should be used to ensure that developers consider broader non-design issues.

Further guidance is provided by CABE in *Design and Access Statements: how to write, read and use them'.*

Both English Partnerships and CABE have produced guidance on design and procurement which, if followed to the letter, would enable the Local Authority to make its contribution. It is instructive to review the subject matter of some of the publications to see where the challenges lie.

Publications reflect concern at the shortage of skills within local authorities (*Assessment of Training Needs in Urban Regeneration and Development,* EP in association with ODPM and CABE), while others look at ways of managing the planning process (*Planning Delivery Agreements* is a report (Jan 2006) by ATLAS: Advisory Team for Large

Applications). In large conurbations such as London there is the additional problem of superdensity schemes having 'cross-borough' implications and involvement from other bodies such as the London Thames Gateway Development Corporation, as well as the GLA.

Local Authority Land

When local authorities own land, or have a strong interest in it, they are in a position to set the procurement framework. They have a choice about how much they involve themselves in the direct management of a project. Experience of successful developments in Europe has underlined the importance of the local authority having a big role in both defining the briefs and then following through their detailed development.

However, the current approach is for local authorities to stand back from the management of developments. Typically they would employ consultants to draw up a brief and manage a competition or tender, in order to select a developer. The developer would then be charged with managing the projects. It is an adversarial, time-consuming and costly process, and seldom results in an optimal outcome. Submissions are often undertaken without consulting stakeholders and residents sufficiently because of competition constraints, with the result that schemes have to be redesigned. Often fresh consultants are appointed by developers at this stage, in order to make savings. All of this is a terrible waste to the community, involving something like five teams in preparing submissions.

Quality, and achievement of social objectives is best assured when the local authority leads, or plays a significant role in the development process, perhaps managing the initial feasibility study. Once the scale, scope and features of the project are identified, the local authority could bring in private sector partners to build the scheme. The authority might continue to take an active part, providing coordination, and reserving specific decisions and tasks to themselves in later stages.

There is now considerable recent experience of public bodies such as English Partnerships and Regeneration Agencies retaining land ownership, directing developments and benefiting from the receipts. This may be a model that would have relevance in large superdensity developments

These approaches require the local authority to have good briefing and project management skills, and an ability to assess each partner's business plan. It need take no longer than the first approach and usually results in a more controlled outcome. The Local Authority may have to finance design up front and have a high level of technical expertise available.

Maintaining the vision

On complex and challenging sites developers usually employ the best designers at the early stages in order to enhance their chance of obtaining an optimal outline planning approval. Approval will be based on the overall vision expressed in the submission. However, once approval is achieved, it is not unusual for the developer to pay less and employ less skilled practices to implement what might be just an outline approval. Quality is lost both because the succeeding designers are not familiar with the design assumptions and concepts, and because they are not familiar with the type of issues raised in this submission. Continuity of designers will enhance the possibility of a successful scheme.

Similar problems can arise when a local authority commissions a design which is subsequently put out to tender. The successful developer will usually employ another design practice with similar consequences. Steps should be put in place to ensure continuity of vision, understanding and design philosophy from the planning application to the construction stage.

Recommendations

- Developers should be required to discuss their Design and Access Statement with planning authorities at the earliest possible moment, before significant design effort has been expended.
- Further requirements for Design and Access Statements should be added by planning authorities to those specifically listed in circular 01/06 to cover matters referred to in the sections on Management, Mix, Tenure and Balanced Communities of this report.
- Planning authorities should consult the proposed housing manager on the adequacy of the statement.
- There should be an assessment of Management Proposals, Mix, Tenure and Balanced Communities based on the procedure used in CABE Design Appraisals.
- Local Authorities should have access to adequate technical support when assessing and briefing for superdensity schemes.
- The report on Planning Delivery Agreements, noted above, should be used as a basis for setting up a framework between developer and the Local Authority for processing larger superdensity schemes.
- The Planning Authority should allow other affected local authorities to have an input into schemes that have significant cross-borough impacts.
- Local Authorities should provide strong and proactive leadership in guiding schemes through the planning process.
- Where Local Authorities have control of land they should directly manage the initial stages of superdensity schemes and consider retaining a financial interest in the resulting development.
- Greater importance should be placed on retaining the same design practice from conception through to the working drawing stage.

Superdensity

10: Meeting the Cost of Service Charges

Superdensity leads to service charges not found in low density development, so new economic models are needed to deal with higher bills and a range of incomes expected to pay them.

The reason service charges are high

The service charges are high in order to meet the cost of intensive management, upkeep of common areas including landscape, and fund the replacement of mechanical equipment upon which high density schemes depend.

Many of the recommendations in this report will put pressure on both capital costs as well as the running costs, some which will have to be recouped from residents through service charges.

Responding to high service charges

We have observed that the best of schemes do meet many, if not all of the recommendations we have made. The formulae in each development, will relate to the particular circumstance of each of them. But it is instructive to review some of the techniques that have been used and others that should be considered.

Methods of reducing the service charge

Reduced costs in other areas can make space for higher service charges. The lower cost of energy in superdense buildings is one example. So is the bulk purchase of buildings or contents insurance for residents where group discounts can set off other charges.

In high value schemes, some of the services could be limited to the high cost dwellings, subject to avoiding problems of ghettos.

Some service charges could be capitalised. This may reduce the price developers could expect from social landlords, or purchasers of affordable dwellings.

Public funding agencies could provide grant to fund capitalised service charges.

Local authorities could adopt more of the external areas, so spreading the cost across a wider resident base.

Changing the business model

The current business model does not in all cases allow for the level of service charge (or design standard) that is required by high density housing. Society has made the decision to use land more efficiently, and this has resulted in higher housing densities. Better standards of design and management are required if the housing is to last into the future. It could be argued, that the higher cost this implies should be taken account of in the business plan.

Service charges could be partly capitalised, to reduce the cost to residents. This would increase costs, or alternatively could be met through reduced land values, or higher public grant, or by local authorities foregoing other s106 benefits.

An aspect to consider is the role of the developer. Institutional developers, which are able to take their return from long term growth, may be able to afford higher costs than developers building for immediate sale. Encouragement of this form of investment could be helpful. Likewise, land holding public authorities should be prepared to take their return from long term growth.

Good planning briefs setting objectives for the area, with associated letting and management plans will assist in setting realistic business planning contexts.

Recommendations

- Minimising service charges must be considered at the earliest design stage
- Where service charges are high, they should be partly capitalised
- Investors should be encouraged to take their return from long term growth, to allow service charges to be capitalised
- Where public bodies sell land, they too should seek a long term return to allow service charges to be capitalised
- Public grant should accept the capitalisation of service charges, as a legitimate project cost
- Residual land calculations should take account of the cost of capitalising service charges
- Planning briefs should specify management and maintenance requirements, and acceptable service charges, to allow these costs to be taken account of in residual land value calculations.

Superdensity leads to higher service charges, not least for cleaning

This report was compiled by four of London's leading practices in residential and mixed-use new-build and regeneration, in partnership with the research and training organisation Design for Homes which focuses on planning, design and construction.

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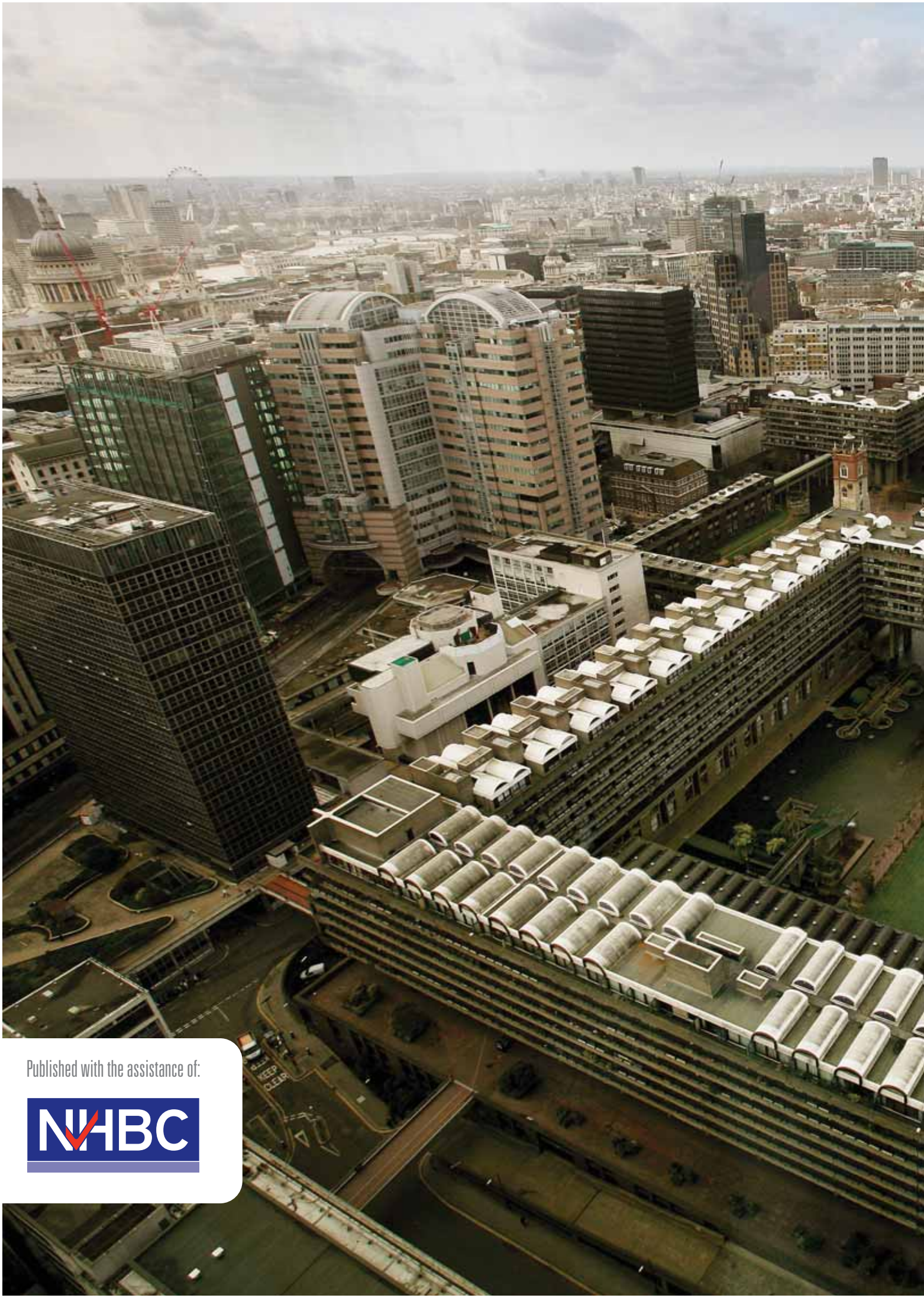

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