



LOCAL LONDON

**Building resilient
neighbourhoods**

nla

Despite current uncertainties around the longer-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on London, it is undeniable that our town centres and high streets can play a pivotal role in recovery and resilience.

This NLA research paper explores new ways to create compact, liveable and sustainable neighbourhoods to build urban resilience. The research is supported by a showcase of projects that demonstrate how our high streets and town centres can integrate a new mix of uses, enhance public realm, improve infrastructure, and ultimately strengthen the capital's polycentricity, advocating for a balanced recovery of London as a whole.

Here we present nine priorities for the economic and social resilience of London's high streets and town centres.

Programme Champions



Programme Supporter



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Foreword

Prof. Carlos Moreno, Associate Professor and Scientific Director of the Chair Entrepreneurship - Territory - Innovation, IAE Paris – Sorbonne University

The climate emergency is a reality. In London as elsewhere, living differently, with a low carbon roadmap, is an essential imperative. From COP21 to COP26, we know that the role of cities is at the heart of our transformations to face climate change and achieve carbon neutrality by 20250.

With the COVID-19 pandemic, which has crossed our lives for almost two years, we are living through an exceptional historical period. The current convergence between the climate emergency and the pandemic in London and all global cities, forces us to think differently about life in the city. This great metropolis needs to develop a strong resilience to mitigate global warming and it is at the same time under strain, and we do not yet know for how long. The most straightforward lesson is that we certainly must rethink here and now our ways of life, of production, of consumption, of travel.

This crisis questions our way of living in the city, which has not changed since the 20th century. Now is the time to live in a metropolis on a human scale. Instead of going faster and further, we have to think in life-time, in useful time. This crisis shows the importance of proximity

and social bonding. It shows us the importance of the neighbourhood and having resources as close as possible to everyone. Yes, we can also, in a global city such as London, seize this opportunity to reflect on life with short distances: to think differently, not about the city, but about life in the city, to give proximity its strength back, to develop as many services as possible close to home. Switching to another temporality, that of 15 minutes, carbonless, on foot or by active mobility, cycling, scootering, with streets and squares that have become places of life, meeting places for mingling, rediscovering nature, water and urban biodiversity, encouraging a multiservice proximity. Making several uses of a place in any possible way, and for each use new possibilities: this is the polycentric city, that of 15 minutes, in the manner of Pascal's concept of "an infinite sphere, the centre of which is everywhere, and the circumference nowhere".

By promoting urban planning through uses that fight against automobile dependency and avoid long journeys by public transport, we reintroduce a choice of proximity by active mobility, on foot or by bicycle. We want to reconcile our way of living in the city with sustainable development, the fight for climate and biodiversity,



and the preservation of urban health. We want to make proximity accessible to everyone by discovering one's neighbourhood, optimization and simplified access to local resources. We have thus put at the center the question of chrono urbanism, our rhythms of life. With the 15-minute city, the city of proximity, we propose London to become a vast network of places so that useful time becomes living time. It's another way of living, consuming, working, being in town. London can also achieve it, it is a question of political will to live differently.

Introduction

As we emerge tentatively from the pandemic, attention is now targeted on strategies for both recovery and resilience, to understand how best the capital can respond to and manage the effects of both future shocks alongside those of structural global challenges, especially the climate emergency. The variety and diversity of London's neighbourhoods — its local civic places, especially high streets and town centres, shaped through centuries of development — have played a major role in its success and identity as a world-leading city. These are the places where the social, economic and environmental needs and functions of the city meet and are visible to everyone.

‘London experienced a 60 per cent rise in vacant shops between January and September 2020’

But they have been profoundly affected by both long-term trends, particularly the rise of online retailing and changing shopping behaviours, and the devastation of the pandemic, leading to prolonged shutdown of most day-to-day business activity and restrictions on travel for

many over the past 18 months. The damage is extensive: London experienced a 60 per cent rise in vacant shops between January and September 2020, for example.¹ Data from mobile phones and credit card evidence that cities around the UK are seeing more activity along their high streets, but in September 2021, London remained bottom in terms of footfall among the UK's largest towns and cities.² Central London, dependent on a daily influx of commuting workers, international tourists and business visitors, has been most adversely impacted in this respect: as the second of two reports produced by Arup, Gerald Eve and the London School of Economics on the potential economic future of the Central Activities Zone (CAZ) notes, ‘The ecosystem of the CAZ is already likely to be scarred as a result of the events of 2020 and 2021, and will need remedial attention, particularly in the hospitality, leisure, and arts and culture industries.’³ On the other hand, some of London's local high streets and town centres beyond the centre have benefited from greater numbers of people being forced to stay close to home, leading them to ‘rediscover’ their local area and its shops, parks and other facilities. This trend might continue if people continue to work from home for part of the week. It is clear, however, that London's continuing prosperity depends on careful management of the finely balanced ecosystem of the CAZ and the outer areas.

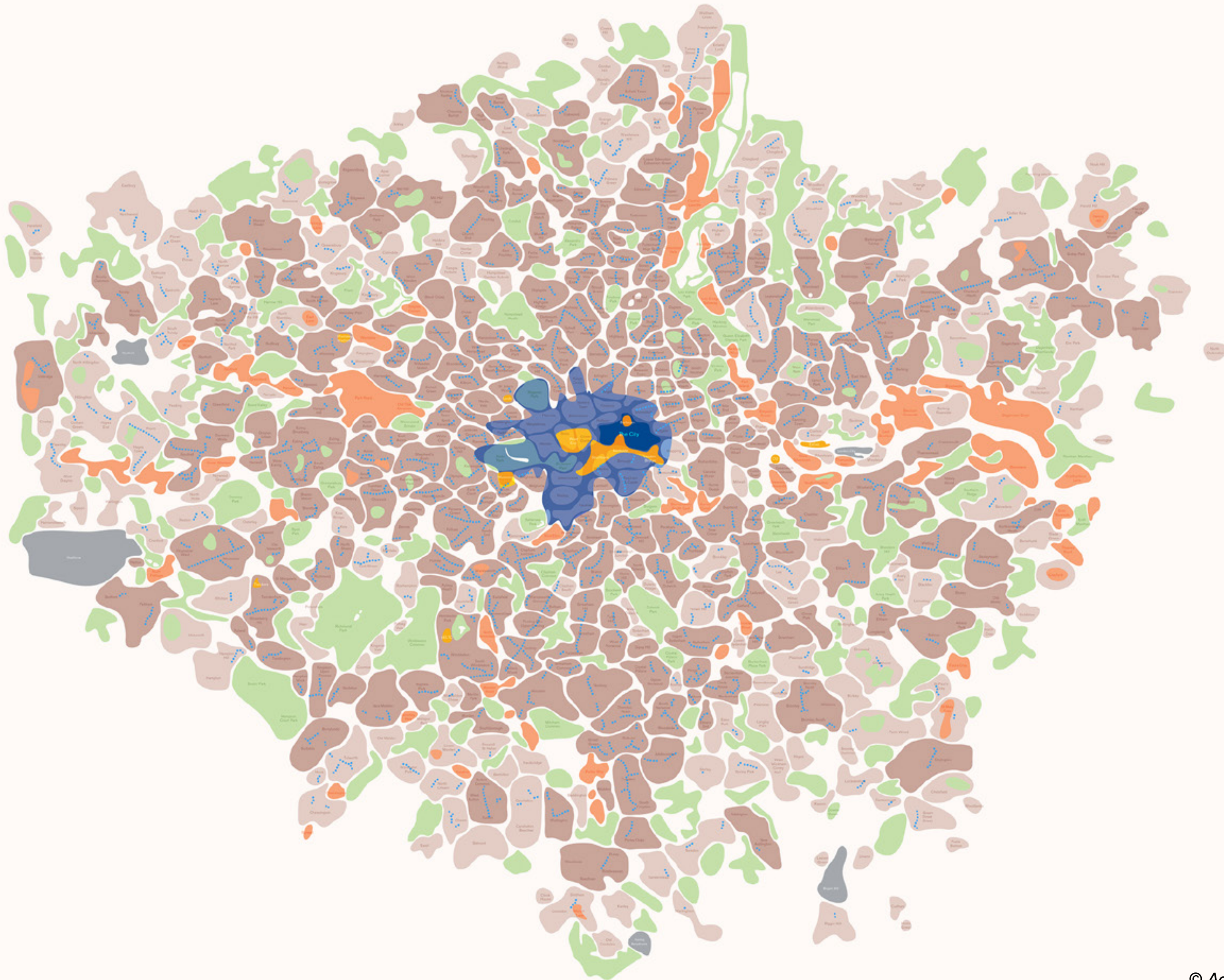
It is still very uncertain how the longer-term effects of the pandemic will play out: at the time of writing, ‘we haven’t had enough normal yet’, says Lisa Fairmaner, Head of the London Plan and Growth Strategies at the GLA. What is generally agreed is that town and neighbourhood centres and high streets — the vital backdrop to our everyday activities, where the public life of the city is played out — can play a pivotal role in recovery and resilience. This is especially needed in poorer areas, where the pandemic has exacerbated underlying social and economic inequalities. The reinvention and renewal of London’s more than 600 high streets and neighbourhood areas have therefore become one of the nine pillars of the Mayor’s London Recovery Programme.⁴ Concepts such as the ‘15-minute city’ risen higher up the agenda as policymakers and the industry seek new ways to create compact, liveable and sustainable neighbourhoods to build urban resilience. As plans and activities proceed apace, this publication seeks to capture current thinking about where energies should be focused. It draws on desk research, events, roundtable discussions and interviews with industry leaders across private and public sectors who are at the forefront of finding practical solutions to support the vitality of local London far into the future.



Boulevard Market Islington Square © Kensington Lerverne

London's localities

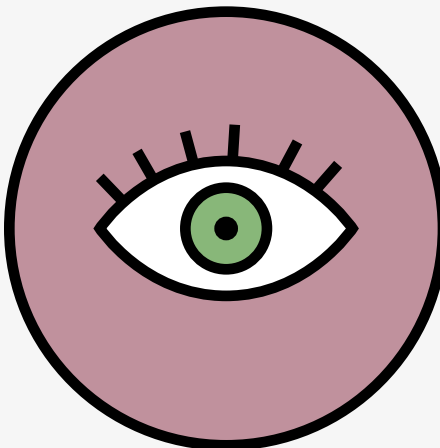
- Central Activity Zone
- ⋯ High street
- Well connected locality
- Less well connected locality
- Airport/aerodrome
- Public park or greenspace
- Industry
- Significant cultural location



© Adam Towle, Greater London Authority

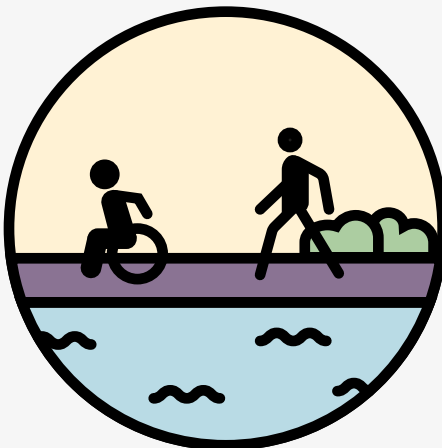
Executive summary

London’s communities and centres have shown great resilience in the way in which they have responded in swift, agile and innovative ways to the greatest public health crisis of our times and its impacts on the city. The priorities set out here, which we examine in detail in each section of this report, have been identified as aspects of planning, design and development that need to be nurtured and improved so that London’s high streets and town centres can absorb future shocks and continue to prosper into the future.



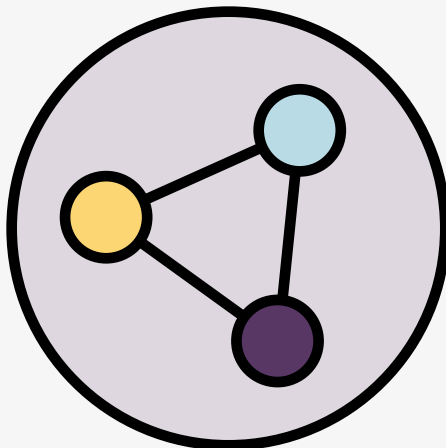
VISIONARY

Understanding the unique qualities and purpose of a place—and creating a vision for it



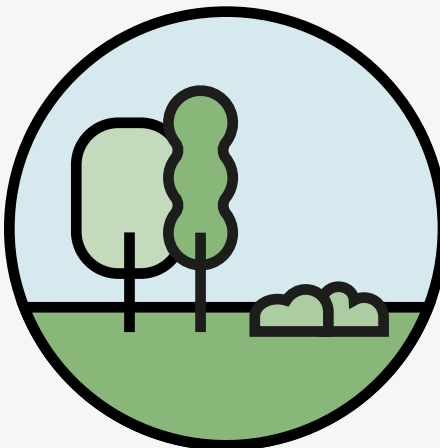
PUBLIC

Recognising the power of well-designed and inclusive public realm



CONNECTED

Appreciating that local neighbourhoods work in harness with agglomeration



CLIMATE RESILIENT

Ensuring sustainability is central to new placemaking strategies



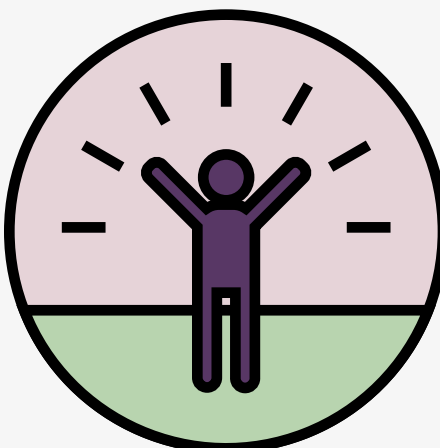
COLLABORATIVE

Working in partnership



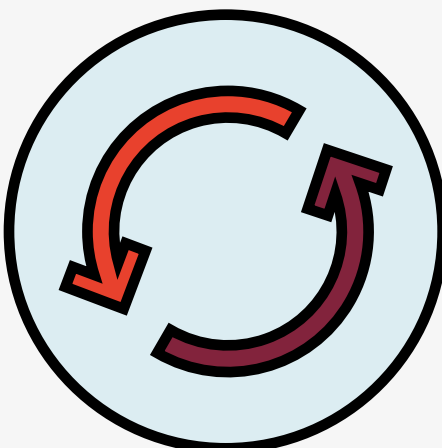
EXPERIMENTAL

Encouraging experimentation



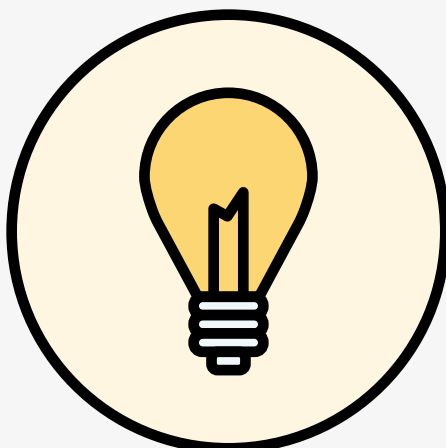
SOCIALLY RESPONSIVE

Reinforcing social value, caring for people’s needs and wellbeing



MIXED-USE

Supporting a more diverse and adaptable mix of uses and services




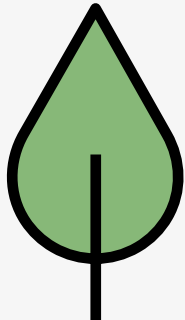
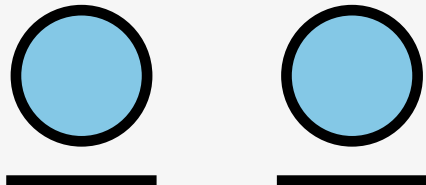
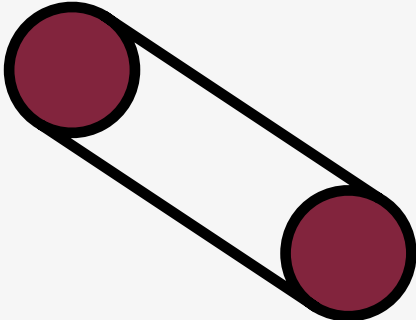
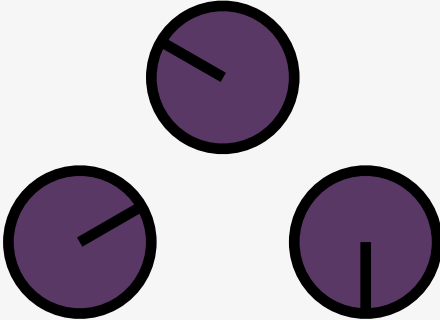
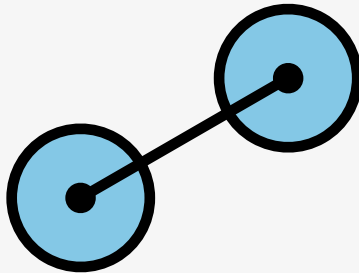
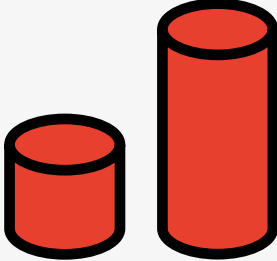


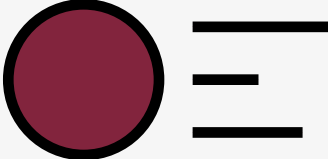

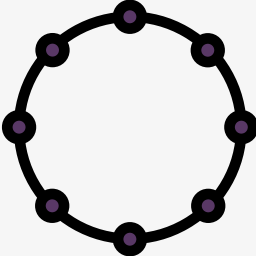
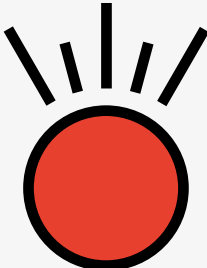

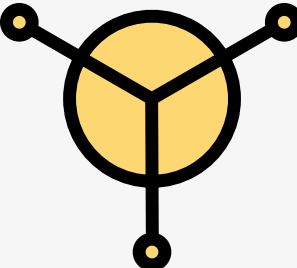
SMART

Capturing the value of data and using it in the right way



The London 2035 Checklist

These priorities for resilience and recovery also relate closely to the London 2035 Checklist presented in NLA’s 15-year anniversary programme, ‘The Changing Face of London’, in 2020. The Checklist sets out 15 themes that London must address in response to current and potential future challenges.

 Healthy A city that prioritises health and wellbeing	 Zero Carbon A greener city that responds urgently to the climate emergency	 Equitable A city of stronger, inclusive and more equal communities	 Flexible Buildings to meet changing needs and support the circular economy, with time-based use of streets	 Polycentric 15-minute mixed-use neighbourhoods with convenient public transport links to a strong centre
 Responsive A city where people can organise their time and space to suit their changing needs	 Leading A leading global city and business centre	 Affordable An affordable housing-led recovery	 Hospitable More diverse and thriving high streets and town centres	 Active A city that walks and cycles, with better air quality
 Meanwhile More meanwhile uses are encouraged	 Viable An open and growing city	 Smart A city that manages and regulates technology and big data effectively	 Public A greater role for the public sector in driving regeneration and housing delivery	 Knowledge-based Research, tech, bio-med and creative sectors drive the city’s economy