



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.

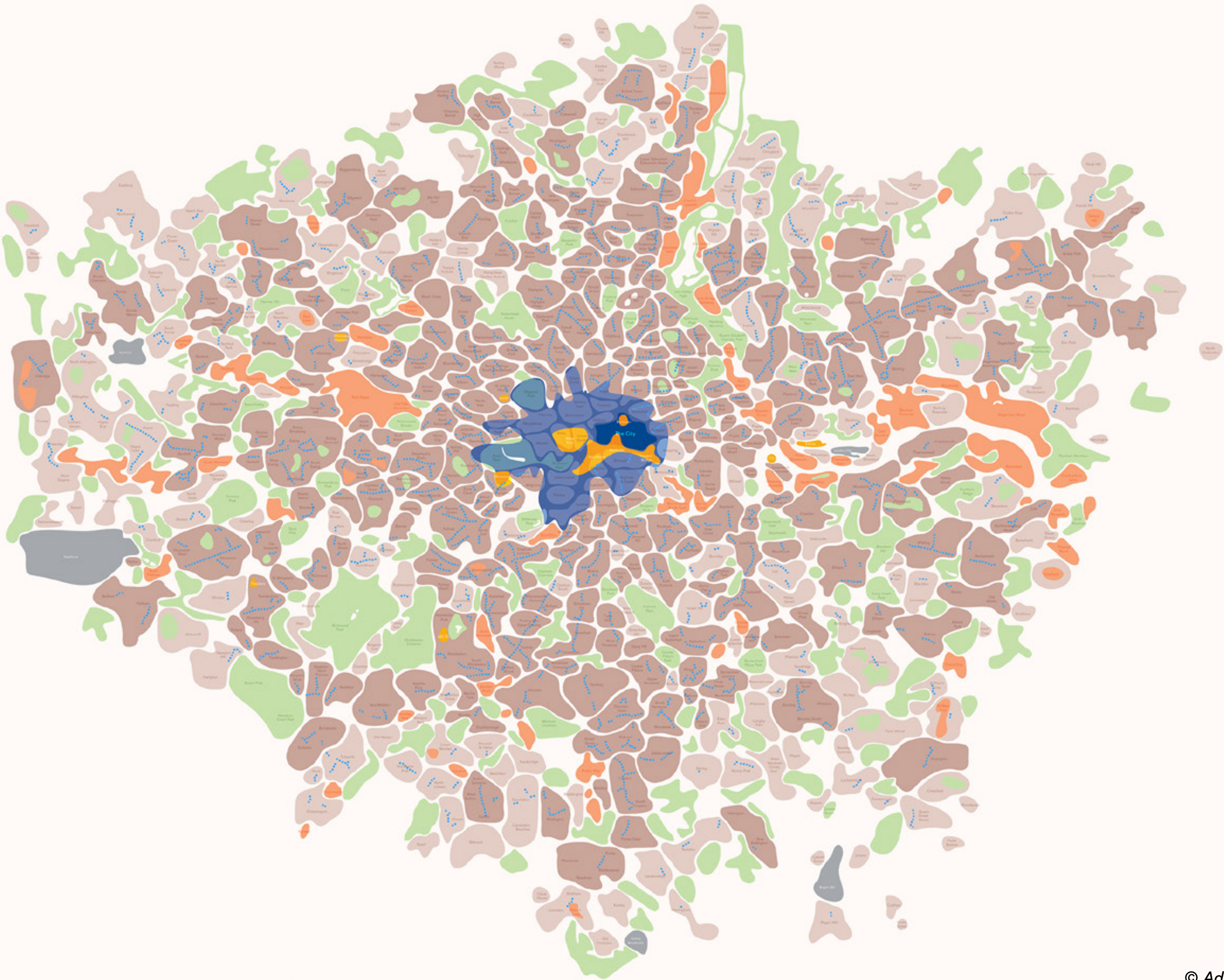
It is still very uncertain how the longer-term effects of the pandemic will play out: at the time of writing, ‘we haven’t had enough normal yet’, says Lisa Fairmaner, Head of the London Plan and Growth Strategies at the GLA. What is generally agreed is that town and neighbourhood centres and high streets — 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

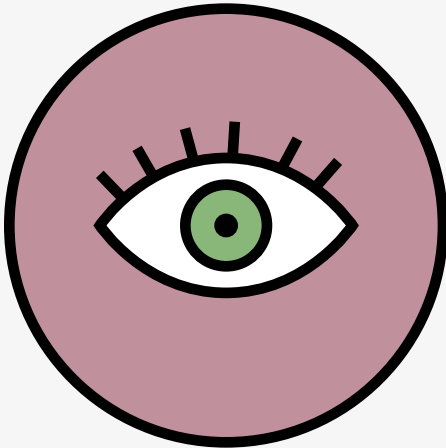
- Central Activity Zone
- ⋯ High street
- Well connected locality
- Less well connected locality
- Airport/aerodrome
- Public park or greenspace
- Industry
- Significant cultural location



© Adam Towle, Greater London Authority

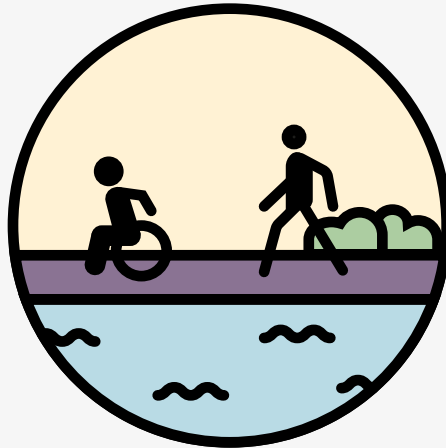
Executive summary

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.



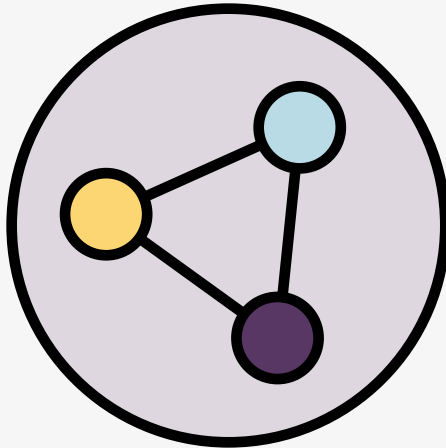
VISIONARY

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



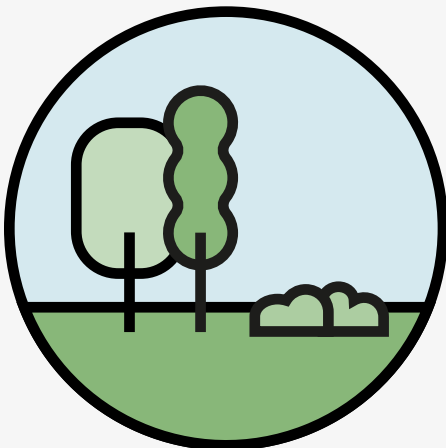
PUBLIC

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



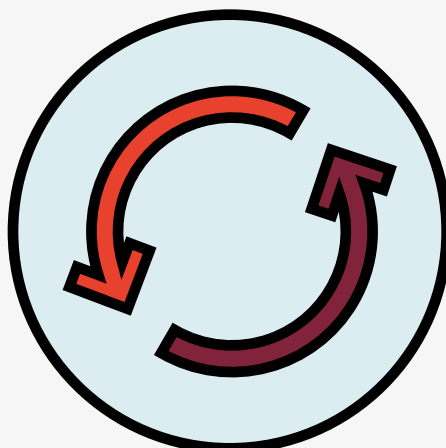
EXPERIMENTAL

Encouraging experimentation



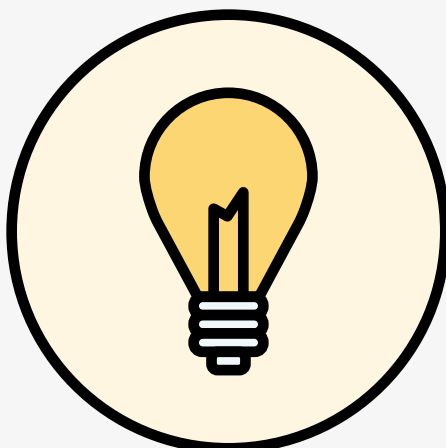
SOCIALLY RESPONSIVE

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



MIXED-USE

Supporting a more diverse and adaptable mix of uses and services




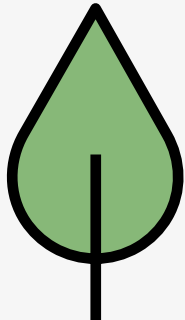
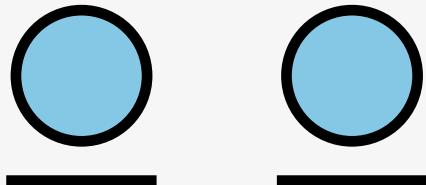
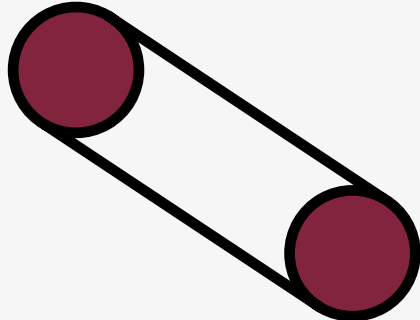
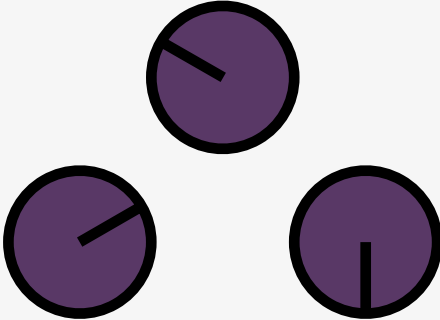
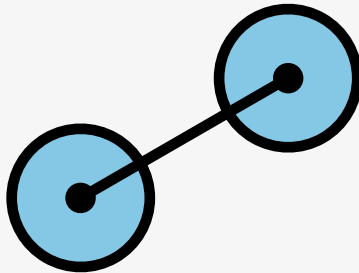
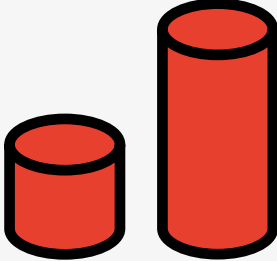


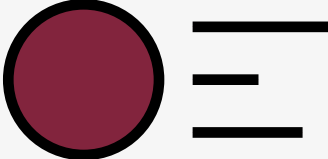

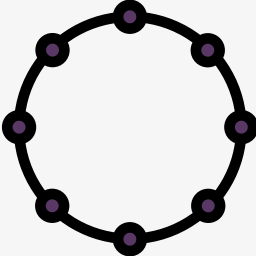
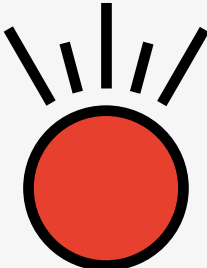

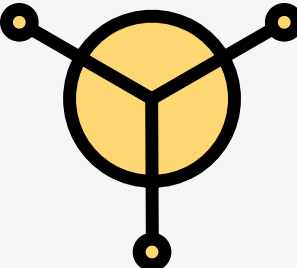
SMART

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

What should be the priorities for recovery and resilience across London's 'towns'?

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

Paradoxically, not having access to the businesses, services and facilities that we perhaps took for granted during the lockdowns of the past 18 months has led many to refocus their attention on addressing the fundamental question: 'What are our local centres for?' While placemaking approaches are now widely embedded in policy and delivery, research for the GLA showed that in 2021 only 10 per cent of London's high streets and town centres had a strategy for renewal.⁵ As Lisa Fairmaner explains, 'a far more holistic understanding is needed of what each town centre is and how it needs to change'. Effective strategies for change need to be grounded in recording, investigating and exploring in depth local character and uses. As Jane Manning, Director at Allies and Morrison, points out, 'mapping underused space is vital' for understanding which parts of the town centre or high street are or are not working well and potentially could be repurposed.

Allies and Morrison's extensive work in characterisation studies has shown that the movement corridor role of many of the capital's high streets — as they evolved from ancient trade routes and networks — is particularly distinctive, especially in how many have developed in a linear way. Although each centre has unique characteristics, activity on the streets on either side of a central street or square can sometimes provide an indication of the health of the town centre. As Jane Manning explains, we 'often see in London centres that the "back side" of the high street isn't well managed at all; there can be a lot of servicing or convoluted access to upper-floor residential from the back. That's where there's a lot of capacity for change.' Another key factor, observes Nabeel Khan, Director, Economy, Culture and Skills at LB Lambeth, is the need to have clear comprehension of differences in economic geography and needs, especially between the 'everyday economy' and high-value, high-growth sectors such as the tech and creative industries. If 'you can distinguish between the two', he says, it is easier for a local authority in particular 'to figure out which levers you [can use] to help'. During the pandemic and recovery, he explains, the key priorities of the

everyday economy — small, local businesses providing goods and services (‘often not captured by productivity measures’⁶) — included pavement licences, quality of the public realm, waste collection and safety, whereas for high-growth business other factors such as the availability of workspace were sometimes more apparent. A key part of a place’s identity and character, as well as its business activity, can often also be its night-time economy: there are 1.6 million night-time workers in London, constituting 31 per cent of the capital’s workforce.⁷

But effective place-based strategies for renewal and resilience cannot only be evidence-based and descriptive; the information must inform a holistic approach to improve wider social, economic and environmental benefits. It is essential to always view local centres and high streets as ‘places rather than a series of buildings’, argues Owain Lloyd-James, Head of Places Strategy at Historic England. Historic England’s High Street Heritage Action Zones programme, for example — a national initiative but one that involves five high streets and centres in London — represents a focus on using heritage as a mechanism for improving wider social and economic outcomes. Ultimately, what is required, argues Robert Evans, Joint Managing Partner at Argent, in a session on ‘Polycentric Cities’ at the London Real Estate Forum (LREF) in September 2021, is a distinctive vision for each place and creative and dynamic approach to delivery: ‘The challenge for all of us [in the built environment industry] is how do we improve the offer?’.



Woolwich is one of Historic England’s High Street Heritage Action Zone

Recognising the power of well-designed and inclusive public realm

High-quality public realm — including green space — is the critically important underpinning of a successful urban place: providing areas for everyone to meet and socialise; enjoy arts, culture and sport; do exercise; walk or cycle to other places; appreciate nature; or simply relax. During the most restrictive pandemic lockdowns, public space undoubtedly took on extra significance as it was for many the only space they were permitted to access outside the home. In London public outdoor space was especially vital, as 21 per cent of households have no access to a private or shared garden, compared with 12 per cent across Great Britain; on the other hand, 44 per cent of London residents are within an estimated five minute walk of a park (the highest proportion in the country).⁸ Anecdotal reports indicate those town centres and high streets that were more resilient during the pandemic were those with facilities open to all, such as playgrounds, and with high-quality public realm. Alex Williams, Director of Borough Planning, Transport for London, cites the example of Herne Hill, which, he says, is an area ‘with a lot of white-collar workers [who were] using the station to get to central London, and are now using local retail and the food and beverage offer’; the major new public realm scheme introduced by TfL a few years ago ‘created the foundation for it [Herne Hill] to do

well during the pandemic, to accommodate the much-increased catchment’ across the local area.

Many agree that improving the quality of the physical urban realm and proactive management to sustain activity and respond to change are essential steps in recovery strategies. Lyn Garner, Chief Executive of the London Legacy Development Corporation, highlights that Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park will be supporting more activity outdoors, as the impact of the pandemic is likely to mean that more people may want to enjoy activities outside through the winter months; going forward the strategy for enlivening the park will include seasonal temporary activities such as winter markets. Temporary activation of outdoor space, especially through spaces for eating and drinking as well as arts and culture, has been one of the most visible aspects of providing safer spaces for people to meet, while also attracting people back into urban centres, including the West End, as a means of increasing footfall to hospitality and retail businesses devastated by the impact of lockdowns. Of these one of the most prominent was the ‘al fresco dining’ strategy instigated by Westminster City Council across 60 streets with pavement widening, greening, and temporary closure of roads and parking

21%

of households have no access to a private or shared garden

44%

of London residents are within an estimated five minute walk of a park



'al fresco dining' on Frith Street in Soho, London, 2021

bays to allow for outdoor restaurant seating in the street. In September 2021 it was announced that that ‘al fresco dining’ would become permanent in Covent Garden and St John’s Wood, although in Soho, for example, there was to be further consultation with the community on potential longer-term schemes.⁹

In the same way, the role of well-designed urban realm, especially in central London, is seen as pivotal to locking in active travel behaviours on a more permanent basis. With the uncertainty about whether commuting and work trips will return to pre-pandemic levels, it will also need to support a wider range of leisure uses as visits to the centre may be ‘less transactional and much more discretionary post-pandemic’, argues Matthew Dillon, Associate Director at Arup. Attractive public spaces to meet, work and socialise will also be key in drawing in and retaining growth industries, especially in tech, innovation and the creative sectors, which tend to require bespoke space design and fit-out, and rely heavily on face-to-face contact.

The pandemic — and several violent murders unleashing national and international outrage — have highlighted how many of London’s streets and spaces (and those in other cities) are still unsafe, inaccessible and unrepresentative of the capital’s diverse communities. Initiatives seeking to support greater inclusivity include the GLA’s Women’s Night Safety Charter — one of the pledges is to design safer public and work spaces

for women at night ¹⁰ — and the Commission for Diversity in the Public Realm, which aims to ‘create a shared understanding of the importance of different achievements and stories in the city’s public spaces’.¹¹ Attention is also turning to the need to create spaces that work for children and young people and to engage them, as future citizens, in the shaping of those spaces. The London Borough of Redbridge, for example, is working with UNICEF (United Nations Children’s Fund) to become accredited globally as a ‘Child Friendly’ borough by 2025.¹²

Appreciating that local neighbourhoods work in harness with agglomeration

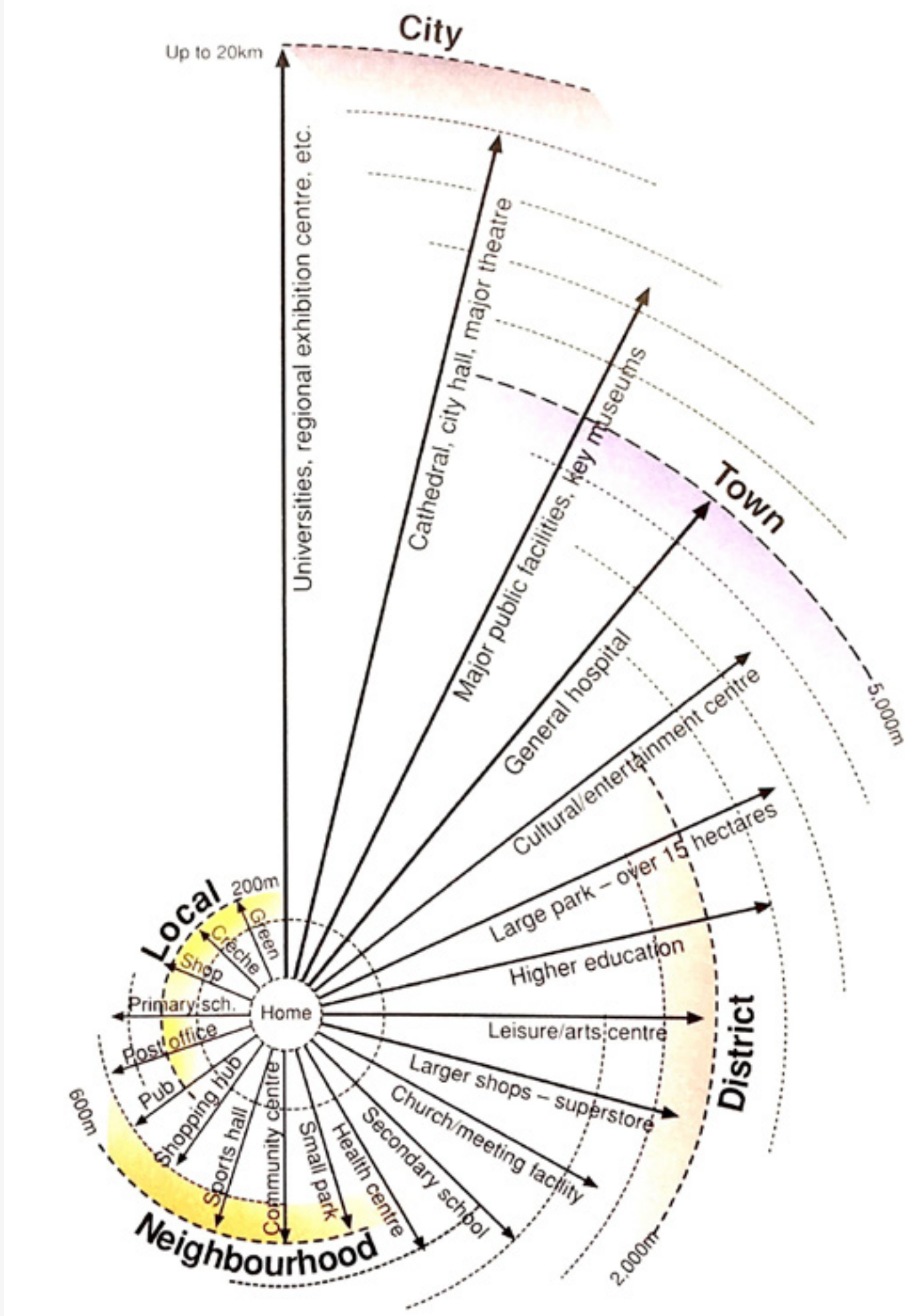
Research by the GLA has shown that 90 per cent of Londoners live within 10 minutes of their local high street.¹³ While communication, services, retail, education and many business operations continued through digital channels during the pandemic, lockdowns and travel restrictions restricted many of us to local living, demonstrating ‘the importance of face-to-face, place-based interactions that are essential for physical and mental well-being and to create connections, collaboration, and innovations’.¹⁴ With its intricate network of centres at all scales, linked by transport



Top: London’s skyline from Brockwell Park
Bottom: Claridge Way, a green artery running through the Moorings, in Thamesmead © Jan Kattein Architects

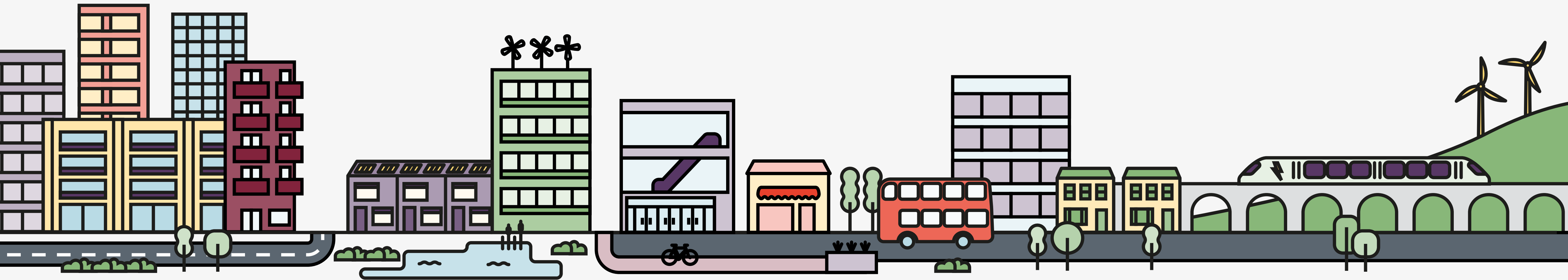
routes, and with many town centres forming transport hubs, London is often described as a polycentric city, as we explored in NLA’s previous report on this subject, London’s Towns: Shaping the Polycentric City. This complex hierarchy according to size and scale is recognised in planning policy, with the London Plan classifying London’s larger town centres into five categories, and local plans responsible for designating local and neighbourhood centres.¹⁵

The importance of having everything a person needs close at hand has led to a resurgence of international interest in the idea of a city based on a fixed travel time (a concept sometimes called chrono-urbanism). Of these the best-known is the ‘15-Minute City’ concept, expounded by the Mayor of Paris, Anne Hidalgo, and the French-Colombian scientist Carlos Moreno. It argues that a sustainable, equitable and inclusive city can be founded on having a number of essential functions—including education, shopping, entertainment and healthcare—within a 15-minute walk or cycle ride from people’s homes. As many have pointed out, such ideas of a compact city—well-connected, well-designed, sustainable, mixed-use and multi-centred—are not new: such places did in fact exist in cities centuries before industrialisation and the invention of the car. The concept has also been advocated through the past century by leading urban thinkers and designers such as Jane Jacobs and Richard Rogers and the Urban Task Force. It is clear that many parts of London do represent the 15-minute



Left: The Sustainable City, a proposal presented in ‘Towards an Urban Renaissance’ by the Urban Task Force in 1999 © Andrew Wright Associates
Right: The 15-minute Paris, by Carlos Moreno © Micael

Urban concepts that promote a sustainable, compact and polycentric city



Compact City

In the 1960s, American urbanist and activist Jane Jacobs persuasively argued that the error of planning in the early part of the twentieth century was the strong opposition to density, recognising instead the advantages of density and the so-called 'Compact City' presented in her book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. To this day, the desired benefits of the Compact City include shorter commute times, reduced environmental impact of the community, and reduced consumption of fossil fuels and energy.

The Sustainable City

In 1998, the Urban Taskforce, under Lord Rogers of Riverside, produced for the UK Government the report 'Towards an Urban Renaissance' which established the importance of developing a higher quality urban product by creating compact urban developments. This resulted in a set of policies of urban intensification to encourage social and environmental sustainability.

15-minute City

French-Colombian scientist Carlos Moreno first proposed the '15-minute City' in 2016, a proposal for developing a polycentric city that embraces pleasant density, vibrant proximity, and social intensity. Paris's mayor Anne Hidalgo included a plan to implement the 15-minute city concept during her 2020 re-election campaign.

20-minute City

Kent Larson described the concept of a '20-minute city' in 2012 and has since been working on the integration of design, technology, and policy to create "compact urban cells." Melbourne's 2017–2050 Plan intends to accommodate growth and combat sprawl through "20-minute neighbourhoods." In March 2020 the Town and Country Planning Association produced "20-Minute Neighbourhoods", a guide looking at how the idea could be introduced in the context of the English planning system.

Hour City

Outgrown from the 2017 Urban SOS student ideas competition "hOUR City," Stephen Engblom's idea of the Hour City emphasis the regional importance of cities and argues that an "hour city" radius — the distance people can travel in one hour — has historically defined the boundary of a city, but with contemporary geographic, social and economic shifts, we need new ways to connect urban, suburban, and rural communities.

city concept, but the critical priority for a sustainable, green recovery is to avoid a car-led recovery: ‘London has to be read as a modern city and can’t do that if it continues to be car-dominated’, observes Lisa Fairmaner.

‘Is polycentrism a good thing?’, an expert panel was asked at LREF in September 2021. ‘If we get it right’, responded Robert Evans, ‘it offers the potential of a more balanced city — a better matching of demand and supply, less overloading of systems, a more pleasant city. Perhaps a more levelled-up city.’ But, he said, ‘it has to work for central London as well.’ Ensuring that the dynamic between central and outer London centres does not become too unbalanced is one of the most complex challenges in recovery strategies for the whole capital. London could be read as a 15-minute city if it were not for the large proportion of journeys that were due to people commuting and travelling into the centre. The Central Activities Zone (CAZ) relies on a vast catchment area, yet the agglomeration of the centre supports jobs, livelihoods and a broad social, economic and cultural ecosystem far outside its geographical boundaries and indeed beyond the UK. It has previously been estimated that the CAZ provides about one-third of London’s jobs and generates about 10 per cent of the total economic output of the UK.¹⁶ It is generally agreed, therefore, that a strategy for long-term resilience should be founded on the principle of encouraging people back into central London and responding to changing consumer tastes and working patterns, while also

attempting to solve older problems such as congestion, poor air quality and inaccessibility. In addition, the arrival of the long-awaited Elizabeth Line may also transform travel patterns and make central London truly part of the ‘15-minute’ city; the journey time on the line between Ealing Broadway and Bond Street stations, for example, is predicted to be 11 minutes.¹⁷

Other high-speed rail infrastructure could also transform London’s relationship with other cities across the UK and perhaps even the shape of the capital itself over the long term. Stephen Engblom, Executive Vice-President and Global Director of Cities, AECOM, highlights that cities have long been shaped by the length of time (averaging 1 hour) that it takes for a person to travel to and from work in a day. This has been disrupted in recent generations by the effects of globalisation and in particular the need for people to travel further out of cities to find affordable housing. He notes that through the high-speed rail of the HS1 and HS2 routes the Greater London area will expand its radius of a 1-hour travel time to a potential population of 30 million, and argues that if ‘fragmented planning systems can be overcome [through better coordinated regional planning], a global London could help drive the evolution of a fully functioning network of cities, within an hour’s reach of good jobs and affordable housing, across England’.¹⁸

One area in which there is still much uncertainty is

10%

of the total economic output of the UK is generated by the CAZ and it provides about one-third of London’s jobs provides about one-third of London’s jobs

1/3

of London’s jobs is provided by the CAZ

whether hybrid working, in which people travel to a centrally located workspace a few days a week, will continue as a long-term trend. Some see potential growth in ‘third space’ workspace (outside the home and main workplace) in London suburbs — the global flexible workspace provider IWG signed franchise agreements for 15 outer London city centre spaces in June 2021¹⁹; however, the question is whether such workspace is viable in every area. Jane Manning suggests that the picture is still very unclear, as it is likely that in ‘a number of more affluent outer London places, people have resolved their homeworking scenario — they’ve worked out how to rework their house [for it], built a garden office, added an extension ... whereas in other locations there is ... still quite a demand [for workspace outside the home] where people are working on the end of their bed or fed up of working at home’. It is possible then, if hybrid or homeworking continues on a large scale, that the uses of the CAZ may become more varied over time as its overall appeal as a cultural and recreational destination endures: ‘If people are travelling less often for work, they may be able to travel further for leisure opportunities, and we could see a big boom in the leisure market’, with more people going into town more often at the weekends, suggests Matthew Dillon.



100 Liverpool Street Exterior © Janie Airey



Urban greening at 80 Fenchurch Street by tp bennett in the City of London © Hufton+Crow

Ensuring sustainability is central to new placemaking strategies

The response to the public health crisis has demonstrated that environmental sustainability is inextricably intertwined with the social and economic health of cities. The idea of a ‘green recovery’ — harnessing innovation, generating fiscal incentives and reforming regulation to ensure that economic resilience is fully integrated with measures to address climate change — has now become central to policy. In London this has become especially urgent as the capital is expected over the coming decades to experience hotter, drier summers and warmer, wetter winters, along with more extreme weather events, as outlined in the GLA’s London City Resilience Strategy (2020). NLA’s Resilient London report (2021) explores how the built environment industries and policymakers are responding to this critical priority, and it is clear that sustainability has now become a pivotal element in many strategies at different scales.

The Oxford Street District Framework, published by Westminster City Council in February 2021, for example, ‘recognises the need for a coordinated district-wide approach and that the pandemic offers a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to rethink this important piece of London’ — often described as ‘the nation’s high



Elephant Park © John Sturrock, Gillespies

street’ — with an emphasis on ambitions including exemplar zero-carbon retrofitting of heritage buildings and a zero-carbon transport network.²⁰ At the other end of the scale, many of the projects funded in the GLA’s High Streets for All Challenge show how local communities are focusing on the green agenda to generate new jobs, promote a circular economy, support health and wellbeing, boost biodiversity, provide affordable business space, and create or reinvigorate community facilities.²¹

Working in partnership

With the drastic reductions in public sector budgets and economic shock of the pandemic, the need to work in partnership to improve and maintain London’s centres has taken on greater significance than ever before. In NLA’s previous reports London’s Towns and Public London, we chronicled the ever-growing importance of the Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) — to which local businesses pay a levy invested locally in projects within the district’s boundaries — in the proactive management of places in the capital. Today there are 66 BIDs in London, with new ones being formed all the time.²² A fundamental part of their success has been in the ability to not only represent the interests of often hundreds of diverse businesses but also to harness the value of partnership working with local authorities and private-sector development. The great

advantage is that ‘BIDs are hyper-local’, explains Jace Tyrrell, Chief Executive at New West End Company, and are spearheading recovery strategies — especially in central London, where the key focus is towards encouraging people to return — through being able to offer coordinated marketing across the area, advocacy for inward investment, and especially real-time data collection to provide commercial insight.

The first BID in the UK was established in Kingston in 2005, and as the BID model has matured over the last 15 years, the nature of partnership working has expanded and adapted to the needs of each place. In Kingston itself, as Lisa Fairmaner (former Head of Planning at the Royal Borough of Kingston), notes, there has been a ‘real move for the university to look at its “town and gown” partnership’, establishing a three-way collaboration with the local BID and local authority to work closely together on improving the centre as a destination and a place, which provides mutual benefits. The power of cultural, educational and other institutions in driving effective placeshaping and reviving town centres is not to be underestimated, agrees Nabeel Khan, who points out that Lambeth’s Economic Resilience Strategy is being revised to include ‘a much bigger focus on anchor institutions’ including the borough’s health partners such as St Thomas’ and King’s College hospitals. These are key to a sustainable recovery as they are major employers, with considerable purchasing power, and have a physical presence on the street.

66

there are 66 BIDs in London

35%

only 35 per cent of Londoners believe they can influence local decisions, yet

65%

agree it is important to be able to

As partnerships are gradually becoming more diverse, the need to put the community at the heart of shaping and maintaining their local places has again been sharply highlighted by the pandemic, when hyper-local, self-organised activities such as mutual aid groups, open-source production of personal protective equipment, (PPE) and new food banks, for example, emerged in immediate response to need.²³ Some councils, including Redbridge, are now looking to distributed and co-located services in response to community need, through the creation of local hubs spread around the borough, rather than in one place.²⁴ New and more flexible models of partnership working are also seeking to enhance local people's ability to actively participate in decision-making and development. Heritage development trusts, for example — although there are none as yet in London — are social enterprises or charities that acquire and manage a portfolio of heritage assets, 'to create an economically sustainable model through their revenue-raising potential' in response to community need.²⁵ Centre for London's research into localism has also called for the creation of 'Community Improvement Districts', a hybrid of the Business Improvement District model and the parish council. Its research in 2019 showed that 'only around 35 per cent of Londoners believe they can influence local decisions, yet 65 per cent agree it is important to be able to'.²⁶ This shows how much scope remains to bring in new types of partnership working that ensures placeshaping is truly responsive to its community.



The Exploratory Park in Brent Cross Town © John Sturrock

Encouraging experimentation

Perhaps more than any other factor, the shock of the pandemic and prolonged shutdowns has highlighted how the adaptation of town centres and high streets for modern needs has often been hampered by slow decision-making processes and an aversion to risk. The steady lifting of restrictions during 2021 saw a rich and varied array of temporary measures across London (but especially in the centre) — pop-ups, festivals, public art, street adaptations and greening, al fresco dining (mentioned above), among many others — to create a continuously dynamic, animated and attractive environment, with the key aim of increasing footfall and spending and reviving the economy. Some local authorities are also taking a more directly entrepreneurial approach. Hounslow Council announced in late August 2021 that it was to offer every household in the borough a £20 voucher to spend in local participating businesses, to encourage ‘in-person’ rather than online spending.²⁷

What is also noteworthy alongside these measures themselves is an emerging change of mindset. The pandemic has forced the industry and especially policy-makers to make decisions faster and be more responsive, think more creatively, be more open to experimentation, and particularly to develop an attitude

that encourages temporary testing of initiatives ahead of determining whether they should be permanent. Meanwhile uses can also be used in an iterative way for participation and engagement, ‘although it’s not something we have always done that well in London’, suggests Jane Manning. We need ‘more flexibility — more “can do” and “why not”’, argues Nick Searl, Joint Managing Partner at Argent. This view is shared by many others including Michael Meadows, Head of Planning at British Land, who agrees that ‘not being afraid to try things’ is a key message for recovery strategies. Meadows quotes the example of the conversion over just five weeks of a former office building on the company’s Broadgate estate in the City into a large rehearsal and artist development complex for the New Diorama Theatre, with space being offered free of charge for freelance and independent artists over the next year.²⁸

The Marble Arch Mound made headlines as the most high-profile meanwhile project: a temporary landscape installation conceived by Dutch studio MVRDV and designed to encourage visitors to return to this end of Oxford Street. Opened in July 2021, it was widely criticised in the media and elsewhere for failing to meet the expectations of the luxuriantly green hill featured in



The Marble Arch Mound is a temporary installation that brings a renewed excitement about the area

renderings, and for its costs (estimated at £6 million), yet by the end of November 2021 had attracted 200,000 visitors and also offered a new attraction in the form of a light installation inside. The leader of Westminster City Council went on record to say that the attraction had opened too early and cost far more than anticipated, yet the project can also be seen as an example of how a local authority is visibly taking a risk, being ambitious and trying out new ideas.

Of all the temporary measures, some of the other key works have been the changes undertaken by Transport for London to the capital's road network. The Streetspace for London Programme aimed to encourage walking and cycling during the pandemic, where restrictions allowed, but also to contribute to a sustainable recovery through continuing to promote active travel rather than car journeys. Measures include new walking and cycling routes along major corridors, pavement widening and moves to reduce traffic on residential streets through the Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs) initiative.²⁹ Among the other measures, over 100 km of cycle lanes were delivered in just one year, whereas previously they would have been scheduled to be done in four. Although 89 LTNs were also delivered across London, in some areas they attracted local opposition and negative publicity, showing how temporary measures in public spaces can still be challenging to implement and require effective liaison with the community and with multiple

stakeholders. As Alex Williams points out, LTNs have been particularly successful in boroughs where such measures have been 'an evolution of what they [the councils] are doing. It is more difficult where they are doing it for the very first time.' This demonstrates the continuing importance of iterative and responsive, rather than sudden and imposed, change.

100km

over 100 km of cycle lanes were delivered in just one year

89

Low Traffic Neighbourhoods were delivered across London

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

‘High streets don’t magically happen — they need people to activate them’, says Stephen Engblom. A survey for the London Recovery Programme showed that 45 per cent of respondents said that their primary use of the high street was not related to retail, ‘evidence that Londoners value the social exchanges that high streets support’.³⁰ High streets and town centres, as public places, have been described as ‘the original social network’.³¹ They have always adapted to change over the centuries, but the pace of change in online retailing, accelerated by the pandemic, alongside other factors such as reductions in public-sector services, means that reshaping of the physical spaces at the heart of neighbourhoods has not always responded as quickly.

The role of these spaces has been shifting gradually over the last generation from that of a service centre and place for transaction to one where informal social and community spaces are starting to take on more importance. “Lower order” centres seem to be weathering better as they are not reliant on large commercial units’, remarks Hilary Satchwell, Director at Tibbalds, and Mayor’s Design Advocate, evidenced by the fact that in the first half of 2021, 804 locally run stores — including barbers, bakers and cafes — opened in UK high streets and shopping centres, compared

to a loss of over 5,000 chain stores, hospitality and retail.³² Being confined to their local areas for much of the past 18 months, owing to lockdowns and other restrictions, ‘people have gained more ownership of the high streets’, says Jane Manning with support for locally run and independent ventures also a product of widespread concerns about environmental sustainability and ethical manufacture and supply chains. High streets are evolving and prioritising spaces for production once again. With urban agriculture and food production on the rise, Mercato Metropolitano, for instance, will transform Redbridge Town Hall car-park into a covered food market, promoting fresh food from local growers and encouraging social enterprise with start-up food and beverage businesses.

Critically, independent and locally managed spaces tend to provide much more of the informal social infrastructure that sustains community life, as much as community centres, healthcare, education and other services provide the formal social infrastructure. Interest in and awareness of how these spaces play a key role in supporting local economies and social structures is gaining traction, with a report on ‘Connective Social Infrastructure’ published by the GLA in late 2020. It explained that social infrastructure ‘cannot be understood solely as places and services.

45%

of respondents said that their primary use of the high street was not related to retail

804

locally run stores — including barbers, bakers and cafes — opened in UK in the first half of 2021



Boulevard Market View North Islington Square © Kensington Leverne

The relational aspects — how people use places and give them purpose — is critical.’³³ Equally important is greater understanding that, with the decline of traditional bricks-and-mortar retail and leisure, people in central and suburban centres alike are ‘not there to shop but to dwell’, says Lisa Fairmaner, and that these spaces ‘need to be attractive places where people want to visit’, argues Owain Lloyd-James. Both social and economic value now lie in promoting better experiences, at whichever scale of town centre or high street, and in understanding the vital role that the community can play in supporting and delivering these.

Supporting a more diverse and adaptable mix and of uses and services

The predominance of vacant retail units across the capital (and the UK) is the most visible sign of the way in which town centres and high streets have often failed to keep pace with both longer-term and recent shifts in their patterns of use. Much attention has been given to how empty shops can be repurposed to meet contemporary need and revitalise these centres. The same potentially applies to offices if there is a significant trend towards consolidation and reducing property footprints; while demand for Grade A office space in London has risen in 2021, for example, it is still below longer-term 10-year trends.³⁴

What is clear is that London’s high streets and town centres already support a diverse ecosystem of uses, and can potentially house others, including more residential use in many areas. Research undertaken in 2021, for example, showed that of buildings used by cultural organisations funded by Arts Council England, 75 per cent are either on or within a 5-minute walk of a high street in England.³⁵ The National Health Service (NHS) Confederation and community business support organisation Power to Change have also advocated for a greater role for health and wellbeing services in regeneration: ‘Critically, not only can they be provided on the high street, their effectiveness and engagement may well be improved by being situated there’, thus supporting a more sustainable, viable community.³⁶ Stephen Engblom notes that international examples may prove useful models for London: large-scale suburban areas and centres in San Francisco, for example, are being transformed by distributed healthcare and education: ‘Healthcare can build out “non-speciality” places in less expensive ways and can activate street fronts,’ he notes. Demands for more varied spaces combined with drastic cuts to public spending mean that many councils are now pursuing more creative and innovative ways of co-locating and combining services and community uses. Just one example is Enfield Council’s refurbishment of the existing Fore Street Library (occupying two ground-floor units designed originally for shops) to create a new ‘Living Room Library’. It has a flexible design allowing a range

75%

of cultural organisations funded by Arts Council England, are either on or within a 5-minute walk of a high street in England

of functions from youth facilities to business support, alongside the original library.³⁷ Child Graddon Lewis's research project 'Retail Therapy' also explores practical solutions to repurposing in-town shopping centres which have fallen into decline, through such measures as incorporating accommodation on upper floors to generate more predictable footfall levels, and adapting external areas and internal atria to provide markets and leisure event space.³⁸

Recent changes to the planning system were intended overtly to support more diverse and flexible uses, but some see danger signs. In August 2021, for example, permitted development rights — where works can be undertaken without the need for a grant of planning permission — were updated in planning rules to allow shops and other commercial buildings and light industrial units to be converted into homes, raising concerns about the loss of publicly accessible ground-floor units in high streets and town centres. The Town and Country Planning Association warned that this could mean the potential loss of 80 per cent of commercial high street uses (and in places such as Barnet as high as 89 per cent).³⁹ The Class E category of use class in planning, introduced in September 2020, encompasses commercial, business and service uses — from financial and professional services to food and drink, offices, day nurseries and gyms, among others — and allows a building to serve different functions, either co-located or at different times of day.

Some see this as allowing more flexibility in repurposing and encouraging innovation: 'a call to arms for architects to reclaim their role and responsibility in safeguarding the next chapter of a building's life'.⁴⁰ Others have the view that decisions have been taken out of the hands of local authorities and communities, as planning permission is not required for changes of use within Class E. A danger, especially in local town centres, says Debbie Jackson, Executive Director of Growth, Planning and Housing at Westminster City Council, is 'the shift from active to non-active' on the ground floor, where 'you start to fracture the continuous strip'. However, this may be less of a concern particularly in the central 'super centres', she says, where 'creativity would not be stymied by rigorous use classes', especially in the potential ability to provide more much-needed food and beverage options along Oxford Street, for example.

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

Nabeel Khan notes that in Lambeth, and indeed in other boroughs, 'when we had the first lockdown, it was clear we just didn't know enough — across London — about our local economies ... There wasn't a dynamic way of seeing what was happening. That was quite worrying.' The need to continuously monitor COVID-19 infection rates in real time to stem the spread of the virus made

visible, in news reports and elsewhere in the media, the necessity of having constantly updated and reliable data. There is now much more understanding of how availability and analysis of real-time and granular data — especially from mobile telephone, bank and credit card spend, and transport use — plays a vital role in supporting proactive, coordinated responses to changes in the high street and town centre and underpins effective operations on the ground. Furthermore, digitising this data in the form of a digital twin gives planners, businesses and organisations a competitive advantage by enabling places to adapt quickly to changes in real-time. In response, in 2021, the GLA launched the High Streets Data Service, currently only available to boroughs, which provides ‘the most comprehensive locally derived evidence base for specific places ever assembled’ and an overview of ‘how specific places respond to the challenges of reopening and recovering’, which can be compared with trends that existed before the pandemic and in 2020.⁴¹ Carlos Moreno and others have also outlined how the optimal implementation of the 15-minute city concept, as a ‘smart city’, is dependent on ‘a rich interconnected array of Internet of Things (IoT) devices that have the capacity to collect, and send data to a centralized network, where this data is then computed, analysed and distributed, in real-time’ to respective urban planners and authorities to provide tailored services within the area in question.⁴² This prospect may not yet be too far distant: the pandemic has shown us how the

planning system itself can be translated to the digital sphere, with committees and consultations continuing to take place online rather than in person, and how internet retailing and delivery and other apps help to sustain the 15-minute city and allow communities to stay connected through digital infrastructure. Indeed, ‘the idea of the 15-minute neighbourhood is underpinned by a whole network of logistics’ as Kat Hannah, Masterplan Strategist of the Euston Project at Lendlease, made clear during “The New Geography of Cities” an NLA event during WRLDCTY in October 2021.

While there is much more insight available in terms of quantitative data to help policy-makers and others plan their recovery strategies, some raise concerns that this data is not inclusive enough. Qualitative as well as quantitative information and more social research are needed to give a much more rounded picture of how and why people use their local centres and what they need from them. Data gathering can be inequitable as its setup is dependent on human bias: ‘Let’s not design our city around the typical smart phone user’, argues Matthew Dillon. As Lucy Taylor, Director of Growth and Sustainability at Ealing Council, highlighted at LREF 2021, ultimately, ‘People value their local areas. ... We need to take people with us.’



Top: UK Deliveroo orders soared by 59% despite restaurants reopening in the summer of 2021
Bottom: ‘The People Speak’ event during the London Festival of Architecture 2021 discussing the new Aberfeldy masterplan with residents



Hackney Bridge is a meanwhile project that provides incubator spaces for a range of people and organisations © Harry Winteringham

Viewpoints



Resilient places

*Anthea Harries, Head of Assets,
King's Cross, Argent*



Future high streets

*Sophie Bowerman,
Associate Partner, Axiom Architects*



Creating places with soul

*John Mulryan,
Group Managing Director,
Ballymore*



Positive directions but more action needed

*Jace Tyrrell, CEO,
New West End Company*

Resilient places

Anthea Harries, Head of Assets, King's Cross, Argent

There is no doubt that London 2021 is very different to the London of 2017, when NLA's "[London's Towns](#)" was last published. A global pandemic, climate emergency, and the purported 'death of the high street' are just a few of the battles which have been fought on the real estate front line. And yet, despite the trials and tribulations, we approach the end of this year with much to be hopeful about.

Our city is always changing, and no more so than in the past 18 months. London's ability to renew itself time and again is thanks, in large part, to the creativity of the people and talent it attracts. We have all endured a steep learning curve and the businesses which have emerged in the best shape are those which seized upon disruption as a reason to adapt.

For an estate like King's Cross, the return to work was hotly anticipated and we felt the 'September moment' with many people coming back to their offices. But it's become quickly apparent that what worked pre-pandemic is not fit for purpose now. The popular Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday pattern has emerged — but what does that mean for the rhythm of London?

The emerging power of the employee plays an important role here. The question is not, 'what is the future of the workplace?', but more productively, 'what are the places that people want to be?'. Beyond the fundamental basics of good transport links and better IT, we know that people are coming back faster to the places that offer something which cannot be found on the local scale.

It is also time to disregard misconceptions about destinations having a singular purpose. Hard lines cannot be drawn between those places which are 'for work' and those that are 'for shopping' or 'for eating out'. That's never been an outlook our business has had, but even the industry's most ardent traditionalists are embracing diversification. More than mixing uses, they are being blended. We will see more spaces, both inside and out, which have multiple uses and that are designed to flex and change throughout the day and in response to the people who inhabit them.

As consumers we have also reassessed our priorities and how we wish to spend our time, and money. With this has come a reassessment of the brands we want to interact with both online and physically. Yes, this is driving the 'resizing of retail' but it is something to be



Pancras Square, King's Cross © John Sturrock

celebrated, not feared. Retail brands and the people who create them are reconnecting with their original missions, they are creating better, stronger brands and connections with their customers. This is not just about service and convenience, but sustainability, authenticity and provenance.

We need to bear in mind though, it's not just shops and offices (or other buildings) that make a place, but rather the spaces around them. Never has the public realm been more important or valued. Our outdoor spaces provide the backdrop for people's experiences; they are places to meet friends and family, to exercise, to eat or to enjoy a drink, or to simply spend time. It's therefore vital that while they remain consistently open and accessible to all, they are managed and curated with as much care and attention as we pay to our buildings.

The tidal change brought about by the pandemic presents us with a unique opportunity to create flexible, evolving places that will meet the demands of the modern world. As King's Cross moves into its second decade, we continue to hold these key principles — of evolution and flexibility — close to our hearts. Creating places people love, or master-planning the art of joy, is the lifeblood of our portfolio. We look forward with pride and optimism to what the future holds in store.



Canal Side Steps and Granary Building, King's Cross © John Sturrock

Future high streets

Sophie Bowerman, Associate Partner, Axiom Architects

At Axiom Architects we are thinking about the future of high streets and what the built environment may look like as the way we live radically changes. Our highstreets are shifting to serve as multifunctional nodes in a network of neighbourhoods, each with unique identity and requirements. A thorough understanding and engagement of which, is fundamental to successful change.

To become these more agile local centres, home to a diverse catalogue of uses requires physical adaptation and how we sustainably redefine them, tackling the oversupply of retail space and heavily retail focused infrastructure is a complicated challenge. Planning restrictions, fragmented ownership and leases, sceptical landlords, not to mention physical constraints of existing stock; core positions, structural arrangements, and accessibility, all need to be addressed.

Convenience provision will still be an important offering of these places and the presence of retail will continue to be key to business success driving online surges. To unlock the future, we need to envision the physical form and delivery of retail spaces differently.

Reduced footprints, pop ups and shared occupation are

new ways to envision retail. With these changes, site use can become more efficient and diversified, creating higher occupancy rates and income opportunity, simultaneously eroding previous barriers to entry for many by enabling lower rates and shorter leases. Changing retail and a greater diversification of uses can reduce rear servicing demands and allow relocation to on-street. The rear zones can then, when coupled with permeating existing building stock, be repurposed, to become extensions of the street with secondary frontages, hubs of new activity, adding a new dynamic to the centre.

Diversification doesn't need to make existing uses obsolete. Programming complimentary uses can drive footfall for one another. They do, however, have varying physical requirements and so flexibility and multifunctionality are key components to the design of these places. We must design for longevity and sustainable growth.

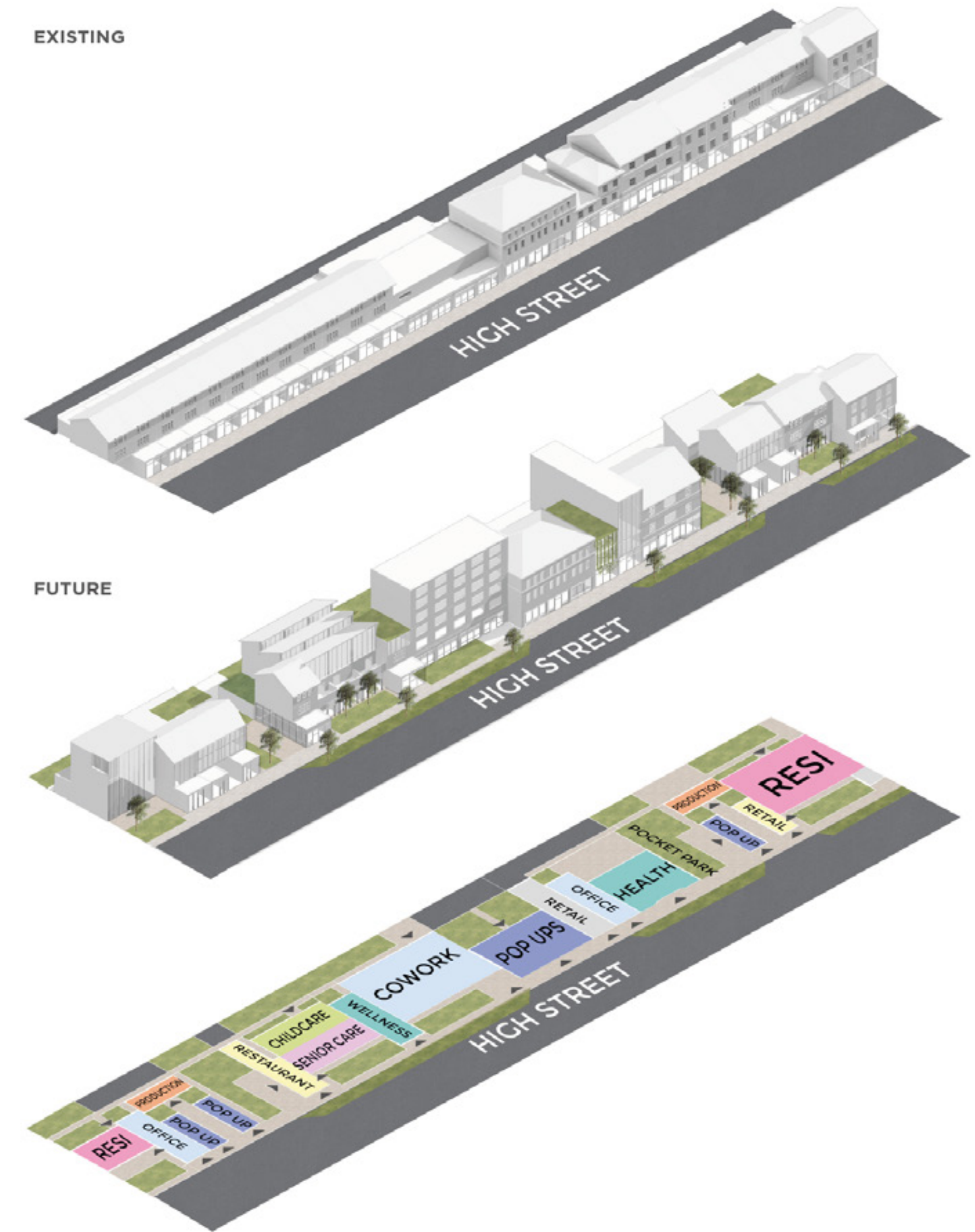
Intensification of uses of must come with plenty of appropriate high-quality amenity and public realm. Our highstreets are public places facilitating cultural and social exchange and should be boosting our wellbeing. They too are now expected to offer leisure and experience, activity and exchanges that are unrealisable

online and are a growing consumer desire.

But how to make this happen? A catalogue of future typologies and parameters that unveils previously locked up equity can incentivise stakeholders for development while simultaneously ensuring the delivery of a collective structural goal. These adaptable accepted blueprints for programming uses, maximising efficiency and increasing capacity, illustrate options for the typical typologies of the high street and town centre; retail parades, department stores, shopping centres, or multi-storey car parks.

This strategy goes hand in hand with new planning mechanisms, and a flexible planning context, one that is equipped to work locally, as well as new infrastructure adjustments, and stakeholder consultation. Ultimately the outcomes, local to each town, will have varying emphases respondent to local needs. Be it on setting up itself a business services and knowledge economy; a more housing focused scenario, where the centre must importantly be place accommodating the increasing population; or perhaps geared toward retail recovery, where the centre recovers a role as a place where shopping and related leisure activity return as the primary use.

The bottom line to this is that change needs to be of high urban design quality led by local requirements and driven by establishing strong partnerships in order to achieve a truly sustainable future and to mitigate the ‘casualties’ of change.



Creating places with soul

John Mulryan, Group Managing Director, Ballymore

While the term ‘placemaking’ has been around for decades, throughout the past 18 months the COVID-19 pandemic has changed people’s perceptions of what this word means for them.

What we’ve seen clearly is that expectations of local surroundings have evolved, with priorities now on work and leisure amenities that are easily accessible within 15-minutes of the front door.

Placemaking has always been central to Ballymore’s philosophy and approach to creating and revitalising communities across the UK and Ireland. The lynchpin of our placemaking success is the local people. It is the people who live and work around our projects that are best placed to help shape and create vibrant, lively communities that promote their health, happiness and wellbeing.

Arts and culture are central to placemaking, whether by developing old industrial areas or revitalising urban communities. They help stimulate local economies and lead to innovation, cultural diversity and community engagement.

Engaging early with local businesses, arts and cultural bodies as well as drawing in new carefully curated

organisations that enhance and complement the local ethos is critical to creating locally inspired places.

The Brentford Project, a new riverside regeneration scheme by Ballymore in West London, is a prime example of this engagement and partnership in action.

Right from the outset, we have worked with local businesses and partners to create points of connection through regular cultural and community events. For the past two summers we have run The Brentford Summer Series in partnership with local retailers, artisans, restaurateurs and cultural groups, celebrating creativity and community. This has included local markets where businesses showcase and sell products, workshops by well-known local artists, such as Mark Pearce, and entrepreneurial talks from big names including journalist Grace O’Neill.

When completed, there will be a dedicated area for local and independent businesses to flourish known as ‘The Lanes’, a pedestrianised network of streets leading down to the river.

All of this puts local people at the heart of placemaking.

This is what turns a group of buildings and spaces into a lively, connected community.

Creating people-centric places requires a holistic approach with intentional design and curation. It's about ensuring accessibility and convenience when it comes to day-to-day 'essentials' because people want their basic amenities to be 'walkable'. This is particularly true in the wake of COVID-19 lockdowns.

Our recently launched East London riverside development, Riverscape, which builds on the success of our adjacent Royal Wharf site, is one which really embodies our approach to meeting these requirements.

The new neighbourhood aspires to the "15-minute city" concept — where all day-to-day needs can be met within a gentle 15-minute walk or cycle ride.

Future residents will benefit from the amenities of Royal Wharf, the neighbouring 10,000 strong community. It has all the high street necessities for daily life — including a dentist, pharmacy, local pub and shops — bringing the community together. It also houses educational facilities, such as the outstanding Royal Wharf Primary School, as well as a residents' gym, spa and a Clubhouse with a 25m pool.

To fully create a sense of place, we also need to ensure that our developments build connections between

people and the natural environment. The pandemic highlighted the importance of proximity to green spaces and nature for people's physical and mental wellbeing as well as to connect local communities.

Riverscape is a neighbourhood which really captures this approach. Rich in green space, it will offer residents 5,500 sqm of landscaping and 97,000 sqm of parkland on the river's edge, accounting for more than 40 per cent of the overall site. Once the world's largest enclosed dockland, this regeneration project also opens up access to the river, with views across the iconic Canary Wharf skyline.

Building on an already leafy position, The Brentford Project similarly focuses on a connection to nature. Here, we are creating beautifully landscaped public areas, as well as sensitively renovating the gardens of the desecrated Grade II-listed St Lawrence's Church, bringing together existing mature trees, open spaces and thoughtful landscaping.

Neighbourhoods need to have their own character, with a distinct sense of place that strengthens local identity. This does not just happen by accident. Only by listening to local voices, placing people at the centre of all decision-making and evolving with their shifting priorities can we truly create places with soul.



The Brentford Project - Drive in at Merlin Classic Cars

Positive directions but more action needed

Jace Tyrrell, CEO, New West End Company

As the Christmas shopping season gets underway, we were pleased to report that London's West End saw its first day of trading where footfall has been higher than even pre-pandemic levels in November. While this marks a huge milestone and highlights the appeal of the West End's unique and diverse Christmas offering, businesses in central London have had to rely more heavily than usual on the domestic customer, as international visitors, and their spend, stay away.

The influx of footfall shows that the West End experience is about more than shopping, with people from all over the country flocking to Oxford Street, Bond Street, Regent Street and Mayfair to soak up the Christmas lights and festive atmosphere. However, for central London businesses to see a return and boost in spend to match the surge in footfall, we cannot solely rely on the British public. While it's fair to say that some travel restrictions continue to hinder international visitors from returning to London, there are other factors at play that need to be addressed to ensure that we see international spend return to the district.

Historically, we've competed with European cities such as Paris and Milan in enticing holidaymakers to our

streets. However, as it stands, sadly London is no longer the most appealing destination for those shoppers looking to board a plane and enjoy some well-deserved retail therapy.

The Schengen visa, which applies to our European rival cities, grants multiple entry to its holders over a six-month period and can be obtained with relative ease and efficiency. The UK equivalent only allows one visit in the same six-month period, and is only granted at least 48 hours before departure, removing the possibility of a last-minute trip for any would-be shopper trying to accommodate a busy schedule.

Given that these European cities already have a 20 per cent price advantage over the UK, following the abolition of tax-free shopping earlier this year, we should be doing everything in our power to level the playing field.

There are so many simple ways to support London businesses and bolster international spend that the Government is overlooking, and we are making it our priority to push for policy reform. Reintroducing tax-free shopping and extending Sunday trading hours in



London's two international centres of the West End and Knightsbridge for example will bring huge amounts of revenue and, when coupled with simplified visa terms, will mean that London and the country can reap the rewards of both international and domestic tourists on our high streets.

At the moment, London's famous streets — those that have so often been the first to house iconic brands, ground-breaking restaurants and renowned cultural experiences — are at a severe disadvantage. If we want the capital to return to its rightful place at the top of the list of global shopping destinations, then making these reforms — which are straightforward actions — is a necessity.



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[Woolwich Elizabeth line Station](#)

Arding and Hobbs

315 Lavender Hill, London SW11 1QL | Status: Planning Granted | Completion: 2023

Client: Argent Related | Architect: Allies and Morrison | Landscape Architect: makower

Arding and Hobbs has been part of Battersea’s heritage since 1910, as one of South London’s first purpose-built department stores it is an important local landmark. The refurbishment plan seeks to create flexible retail and leisure uses across the ground and basement floors and introduce modern office space to the upper floors with a new roof top extension to crown the building. This combination of uses will bring new life to the building and an economic boost to Clapham Junction town centre while restoring the heritage of this iconic landmark.

At Arding and Hobbs W.RE are repurposing the existing structure, fully re-engineering the mechanical services into an all-electrical system, replacing windows and upgrading the facade to improve thermal performance while using sustainable materials in the roof extension, all whilst supporting a commitment to a net zero carbon development.

Beyond environmental considerations, W.RE believe that intelligent workspace design, that places wellbeing and inclusivity at the centre is essential for the office of the future. Arding & Hobbs addresses this through a conscientious restoration of the building’s historic aspects while introducing modern, bright and airy workspaces. All of this accessed through a grand central core that re-purposes the use of escalators and is flooded by natural light through a new skylight. The extensive roof terrace stretches to over 7,000 sq ft and is accessible to all users of the building, offering communal places to connect while hidden nooks provide private spaces for quiet reflection.

For the office user, the arrival on the ground floor is into a large lobby with space to meet and mingle, while the basement provides first-rate end-of-trip facilities. The bulk of the ground floor and basement will host a carefully curated mix of retail, leisure and gym uses that will enhance the experience for the office users, generate footfall, giving an economic boost to Clapham Junction town centre, whilst making Arding and Hobbs a very special place to work, shop and enjoy. W.RE see this retail — leisure — workspace approach as the blueprint for the future of the town centre across the UK. The high street, post pandemic, is here to stay.

“As specialists in London commercial property, we have seen how the market is changing the high street and how mixed-use developments are becoming the lifeblood of the high street in the new world. Combining our expertise in heritage, innovation, and development, we are confident the iconic Arding and Hobbs building will show that the right commercial offer in town centres will be attractive to occupiers and boost local economies through footfall. The building’s greatest asset is its heritage, and it was important we didn’t lose sight of that, as London enters this new era of Place.”

Sascha Lewin, CEO, W.RE



© Arding & Hobbs

Brent Cross Town

Pennine Drive, London NW2 1BW | Status: Planning Granted | Completion: 2035

Architect: Allies and Morrison | *Landscape Architect:* makower | *Developer:* Argent Related

Brent Cross Town (BXT) is a new £7bn, 180-acre new park town, in the London Borough of Barnet being brought forward in a JV between Argent Related and Barnet Council. A significant local regeneration project, it will take inspiration from London’s great neighbourhoods to create a revived economy with a distinctive local sensibility.

Identifying with the 15-minute town concept, BXT’s design enables everything people need to be provided in one place, valuing quality of life as a central principle. It supports the post-pandemic desire to be closer to green spaces, able to access active travel options and to lead more sustainable, healthier lives

With the commitment to be a net zero carbon town by 2030 at the latest, BXT will deliver 6,700 homes, workspace for 25,000 people, over 50 acres of parks and playing fields, and a mix of local restaurateurs, retailers and amenities.

Driven by its pledge to prioritise quality of life for its community, whilst contributing to London’s green economic recovery, BXT’s green spaces will offer a wide variety of new sports facilities, landscaped areas and new networks of walking and cycle paths enabling community cohesion through play, sport and leisure. Local key services, F&B and leisure will form the backbone of BXT to support changes to modern lifestyles, particularly the redefining of boundaries between work and home and to maintain a day/night economy.

BXT’s first retailers, a bakery, roastery and pizza kitchen, are deliberately all production focused with a customer facing capacity, which allows the new high street to successfully flex as needed to varying customer demands

as these outlets have all proved their ability to adapt and thrive despite the challenging retail market. Importantly, as it builds out over time BXT it will remain rooted in its values of community, wellness, sustainability and culture.

“The retail and community use strategy that is informing Brent Cross Town’s high street has been crafted following many years of careful thought and planning and importantly, extensive engagement with residents and businesses, as well as with our partners, Barnet Council. We wanted to get under the skin of the existing communities to understand their needs and wants, as well as to decipher and embrace the elements of the place that make it a special neighbourhood. Curating the best mix of shops, restaurants, bars, fitness and health facilities and culture and music spaces in BXT that strike the balance in amplifying and celebrating the existing and diverse local retail environment but also can adapt to continually shifting trends, whilst bringing out the new town’s identity, is a challenge all of us in London now face.”

Morwenna Hall, Partner and COO, Argent



Chadwell Heath Transformation Area

Freshwater Road, Dagenham RM8 | Status: Proposed | Completion: 2041

Client: LB Barking and Dagenham and Be First | Architect: Haptic Architects | M&E / Sustainability Engineer: XCO2 |
Landscape Architect: BBUK | Transport Consultant: Vectos

Chadwell Heath Transformation Area is a vision for a new neighbourhood in Barking and Dagenham. It will deliver an ambitious mix of industrial & employment uses including scope for gaming, media, and other tech industries. A creative industrial intensification strategy, across the 32-hectare site, will provide land for delivery of circa 4000 new homes, open space, new schools, and local amenities.

Chadwell Heath sits in the north of Barking and Dagenham and adjacent to Chadwell Heath Station with Crossrail link into central London. The industrial site is bounded by residential areas on four sides and has a major road running through its centre. Wellbeing is at the heart of this placemaking vision and this new transformation will prioritise major green arteries that connect from the surroundings and station, converging on a central Market Square, via new parks and pocket squares. Streets are designed for pedestrian and cycle movement, with a cycle super-highway on the north of the site.

The vision rethinks industrial value and the role that industry can play in animating the streets and squares. Residential use sits alongside this industry with small and medium-size businesses that have ‘shop windows’, creating life and space for collaboration. Nowhere is this more apparent than with ‘Saw Mill’ — a major industrial-led workplace, that integrates co-working with sustainable fabrication and educational space. The grand hall spills out on the public square and green spine. This new factory for the future could deliver the homes at Chadwell Heath, through modern methods

of construction and in turn provide employment and education to the area.

The improved and intensified industrial space at Chadwell Heath will provide a home for London’s future industries — a toolbox for London. It will target young people and young families to create life and vibrancy, with affordable homes and workplaces.

“This site at Chadwell Heath presented a number of challenges; a site disconnected from its surroundings, with poor infrastructure and multiple ownerships. Challenges can also bring opportunities, and with our proposal we wanted to set the agenda for the delivery of future-facing industry. Our aim was to create a variety of experiences within each Neighbourhood and explore the future of industry, sitting comfortably alongside residential, tech, workplace and cultural uses. The existing industrial urban grain and working yards had evolved in a piecemeal fashion, with significant under-utilisation of land across the site. In response, a transformative strategic plan must address movement and connectivity, alongside appropriate density that is balanced with open space and amenity.”

Scott Grady, Director, Haptic Architects



London City Island

Leamouth Peninsula, East London | Status: Completed / Under construction | Completion: 2014 / 2022

Client: Ballymore | *Design Architect:* Glenn Howells Architects | *Executive Architect:* Acanthus Architects LW

Situated on Leamouth Peninsula in East London, London City Island is an integrated cultural ‘hub’ which fuses homes and a vibrant high street to create a trailblazing ‘15-minute city’. Dubbed East London’s ‘mini-Manhattan’, the mixed-use riverside neighbourhood comprises 1,706 new homes, creative spaces, art galleries, a music studio, artisan restaurants and bars, shops, affordable office space, and a public square.

Developer Ballymore also gave the English National Ballet its new home on the Island, which has now become the Island’s cultural heart and a driving force behind its artistic spirit.

The vision for City Island was always to create a lively neighbourhood, with culture at its heart, and where its residents would want to spend quality time. However, this was never more important than during the pandemic when the neighbourhood’s family of businesses continued to thrive and grow in Hopewell Square, the beating heart of the close-knit community.

Many retailers opened their doors on Hopewell Square during the pandemic, such as the Lockdown Room, Sainsbury’s (creating 21 new jobs for locals), a new riverside restaurant, Homestead, an ethical luxury chocolate brand Cartografie, the London Lighthouse Gallery, a plant shop The Wild London and fashion brand Artyytude by Lulu Liu. Many of these retailers or artists are also local residents, which reinforced the community spirit on the island.

With all retails spaces now 100 per cent occupied, the Island is now more than just a place to live; it has become an exciting destination in its own right, drawing on East London’s cultural energy, and ultimately encouraging post-pandemic recovery.

The development was the first in the UK to adopt Byldis off-site construction technique which enables buildings to be constructed up to 50 per cent faster than when using traditional methods.

“The arts, culture and design are essential to our lives and to our wellbeing. We must appreciate the significance of the arts to our quality of life, in particular it is this that gives London its soul. English National Ballet is a treasured national asset, and we should all be grateful for what they and other artistic talents, bring to our society. I have been pleased to support them, and urge others to support the arts, especially at this very difficult time.”

**John Mulryan, Group Managing Director,
Ballymore**



Sayer Street at Elephant Park

13 Sayer Street, London SE17 1FY | Status: Under Construction | Completion: 2023

Client: Lendlease | *Landscape Architect:* Gillespies and BD Landscape Architects | *Engineer:* Peter Brett Associates and Buro Happold
Lighting Designer: Speirs + Major and Michael Grubb Studio | *Planning Consultant:* DP9 | *Contractor:* J Murphy and Sons Ltd, PJ Carey Ltd and Gavin Jones

Sayer Street is one of London’s newest high streets and runs through Elephant Park, the £2.5bn regeneration project delivered in partnership by Lendlease and Southwark Council. The development comprises over 3,000 new homes, significant public realm including a new two-acre park, and a retail, F&B, community and leisure mix created to appeal to local residents as well as visitors.

Thriving, bustling streets have always had the ability to serve a multitude of people and uses simultaneously, thereby being inclusive environments to spend time in. When designing Sayer Street, Lendlease adopted this ‘back to basics’ approach, viewing the opportunity to create a new high street from as much a sociological perspective as a developmental one, and thinking about what Elephant Park and its surrounding community genuinely needs from its ground plane. Extensive consultation was key to establishing the right mix of operators, and feedback was overwhelmingly that the community wanted to see local businesses established there.

The diversity of local businesses in operation on Sayer Street has been a driving factor in the resilience the street has shown during COVID-19. Elephant & Castle is defined by its multicultural demographic, so to become embedded within its locality, Sayer Street has to deliver an all-encompassing offering. Nowhere is this clearer than the F&B operators that cover cuisines from Italy, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Lebanon, Japan, the Caribbean, and more. Add to this an art gallery, a community radio station, a plant nursery and the newly opened Walworth Library and

Southwark Heritage centre and you have an ecosystem that works for both the existing community and the new.

Post-pandemic, every single business in Sayer Street and across the wider Elephant Park has re-opened and is reporting strong support from the local community, with recovering sales.

“What we most love about Elephant Park is the mixed-use types of tenure. There’s not lots of similar brands competing in the same space, instead there’s lots of complementarity which is pretty unique. We have a good mix amongst our customers between Elephant Park residents and the local community and passing footfall, and this helps us meet our targets and deliver on our objectives. It’s really good that there’s space in Elephant Park for community-led organisations such as Change Please, and it provides proof of concept for other landlords to follow.”

Laurence Higgins, Director of Impact, Change Please



Snow Hill

5 Snow Hill, EC1A 2DP, City of London | Status: Planning Granted | Completion: 2023

Client: Whitbread LLP | *Architect:* Axiom Architects LLP | *Project Manager:* Cumming Group EMEA | *Planning consultant:* Daniel Watney LLP | *Right of Light:* Point 2 | *Heritage:* Donald Insall Associates | *Transport:* RGP | *Structural:* Heyne Tillett Steel | *M&E:* Applied Energy | *Sustainability:* Greengage Environmental Ltd | *QS:* BAQUS Construction and Property Consultancy | *Communications:* BECG

Snow Hill is a Grade II listed, City of London Police Station, which will now be transformed into a 219-bedroom Hub by Premier Inn Hotel. Designed by Axiom Architects, the proposals comprise the sensitive retention of the Grade II listed Snow Hill building with a mansard extension, whilst choreographing a new remodelled building with extension to the rear along Cock Lane.

A very complex challenge of constraints, with heritage and sustainability at the heart of the design. The Snow Hill block will be retained, restored, and filled with bedrooms. The existing heritage layout will be respected, and will comprise a new mansard extension finishing the streetscape externally, including matching slate roof materials.

The Cock Lane block to the rear will comprise a retained facade to establish the rich quality and character of the street. The disjointed split levels of the existing building we be demolished and remodelled with a new extension. The new extension will comprise an ensemble of geometry, capturing alternating brick patterns, and fun shadow interplay. Internally, significant heritage features such as the reading room, with its dramatic stair, will be retained and transformed into a food and beverage space, and the stair refurbished with sensitive materials.

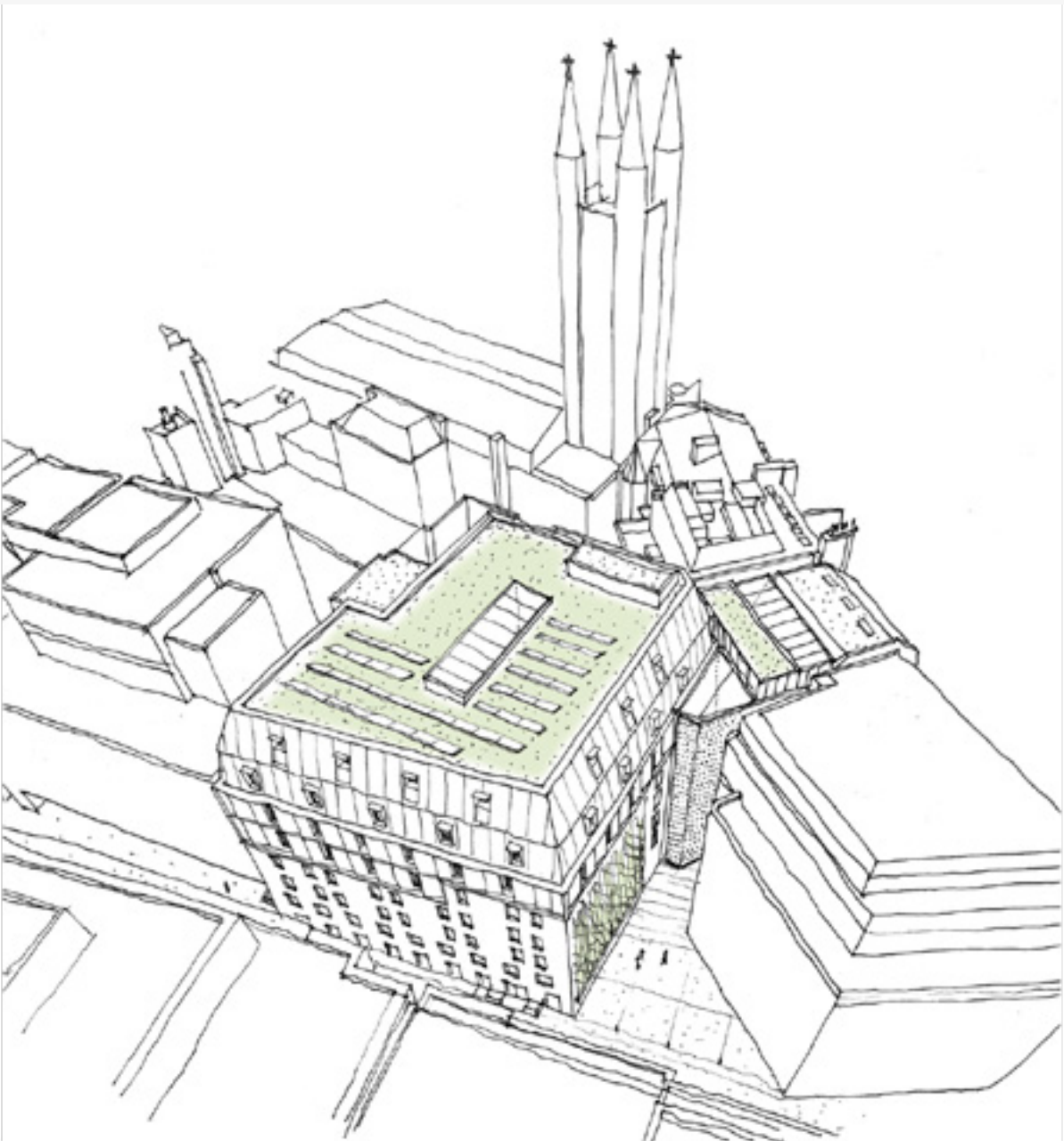
The building will be open to the public for the first time, and one of the most exciting features is the atrium, a new public gallery space. The facade will comprise hit and miss brick letting diffused light washing through the facade and into the space. All visitors will be able to experience the public areas in the hotel, with a sequence of spaces leafing

from the Ground floor to the new food and beverage space, and finally the new gallery space in the atrium.

The building achieves net zero, a fantastic accomplishment for a Grade II listed building, with major sustainable credentials including 68 per cent CO2 emissions reduction against a standard building; scoring BREEAM Excellent; reuse of building and bringing it back into economic use, with total savings of 616,631 kgCO2eq over the baseline or 16 per cent improvement; reuse of materials through circular economy strategy; and recycling of 95 per cent of materials through secondary markets and diversion from landfill.

“We are absolutely delighted to achieve unanimous planning approval for the transformation of Snow Hill Police station to a new 219-bedroom Hub by Premier Inn hotel. It was an extremely challenging set of constraints, from heritage, the circular economy, substantiality, and the complexity of the multiple split levels of the existing building, whilst creating a design which sensitively matched the character and streetscape of the local area. It was a real collaboration with City of London’s design and case officers. The project matched and reflected the City of London’s vision of sustainability and culture.”

James Mitchell, Partner, Axiom Architects





© Charles Hosea

100 Liverpool Street

100 Liverpool St, London EC2M 2RH | Status: Built | Completion: 2020

100 Liverpool Street is the radical redevelopment of an iconic 1980s scheme to create over 520,000 sq ft of contemporary office space, with retail and public realm, in the heart of the City. With three levels of shops, bars, restaurants, and exceptional transport links, the development makes a significant contribution to Broadgate. The building was designed with well-being in mind, with landscaped outdoor terraces on five levels and spacious internal communal areas, so has not required post-pandemic adaptation.

Client: British Land
Architect: Hopkins Architects Limited
Interior Designer: Universal Design Studio
Supporting Services: Veretec
Landscape Architect: HED
Structural Engineer: AKT II
Services Engineer: Chapman BDSP
Principal Designer: Arup
Facade Engineer: Billings Design Associates
Lighting Designer: Speirs & Major
Transport Consultant: Arup
Project Manager: M3 Consulting
Contractor: Sir Robert McAlpine
Cost Consultant: MACE
Access Consultant: David Bonnett Associates
Facade Access Consultant: Hilson Moran
Sustainability Consultant: Greengage
BIM Consultant: GRFN
Technology Consultant: Cordless Consultants
Security Consultant: QCIC



© 3Space

3Space International House Brixton

International House, Brixton, London SW9 7QE | Status: Built | Completion: 2018

The project addresses two specific local related challenges. The first is to move Brixton's economy away from an overreliance on retail and introduce new Creative and Digital Industries companies to the area. The second, to protect existing vital town centre uses that contribute so valuably to the identity of the area and make it the place that it is. Young people, third sector and cultural organisations are all at risk of being priced out as Brixton changes and rents increase.

Client: LB Lambeth
Architect: 3Space
Graphic Designer: Kat Buchanan
Interior Designer: Monty



© Darc Studio

97 – 107 Uxbridge Road, Ealing

CP House, 97–107 Uxbridge Rd, West Ealing, London W5 5TL | Status: Planning Granted | Completion: 2023

Hutchinson & Partners have designed a major new workplace in the heart of Ealing’s Office Quarter. The proposals include affordable workspace and flexible uses connected to a newly extended public realm. The success of the scheme is through its enhanced engagement with this emerging stretch of high street, and it seeks to readdress the car-centric model of the previous use and replace it with a frontage and mixed ground floor programme that invite to engage with both building and landscape.

Client: Spaceworks
Architect: Hutchinson & Partners Limited
Planning Consultant: DP9
Structural Engineer: Heyne Tillett Steel
M&E / Sustainability Engineer: Thornton Reynolds
Transport Consultant: Steer



© David Christian

Battersea Exchange

118 Battersea Park Rd, Battersea, London SW11 4LY | Status: Built | Completion: 2020

Battersea Exchange has turned a divided, historically landlocked site, into a vibrant and well-connected community. It has created 290 new homes, 21 per cent of which are affordable, a new primary school and 4,000 sqm of commercial space for shops, offices and restaurants, as well as a new entrance to Queenstown Road Station. The development is organised around a new pedestrian-friendly public realm connecting Battersea Park and Queenstown Road Stations and creating links from existing residential communities into the new Vauxhall Nine Elms Battersea Opportunity Area.

Client: Taylor Wimpey Central London with Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Southwark, Network Rail
Architect: Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios
Structural Engineer: Pell Frischmann
M&E / Sustainability Engineer: Ingleton Wood, SVW Consulting Engineers
Planning Consultant: DP9
Project Manager: Rider Levett Bucknall, Taylor Wimpey Central London
Contractor: Migard Ltd, Bennett Construction Ltd.
Landscape Consultants: P-IE Ltd



© Dirk Lindner

Central Cross

Newport Ct, West End, London | Status: Built | Completion: 2017

Central Cross dramatically improves the ground-level retail frontage of an existing building by infilling a previously dark and cluttered colonnade. We felt that well-designed, contemporary shopfronts would contribute to the improved character and appearance of the building and to the conservation area. The scheme makes a significant contribution to improving an area of public realm within central London by enlivening Newport Place and improving the entrance experience at the eastern end of Chinatown.

Architect:
Buckley Gray Yeoman
Client: Shaftesbury
Structural Engineer:
Heyne Tillett Steel



© Weston Williamson + Partners

Crouch End Town Hall Urban Realm

Crouch End Hill, London | Status: Proposed | Completion: 2019

The proposals for Crouch End address the segregation caused by the prominence of vehicles around the 1935 Reginald Uren Town Hall and tie in with its refurbishment. Through the removal of the pedestrian crossing, traffic lights, railings and signage a new traffic calmed shared space is created prioritizing pedestrians over vehicles. The proposal includes temporary reclaiming of streets adjacent to the Crouch End clock tower and converting car parking spaces to outside seating.

Architect:
Weston Williamson+Partners



Culture Palace, Enfield Town

The Town, Enfield, London EN2 | Status: Built | Completion: 2021

Culture Palace brings together local cultural and creative enterprises under one roof in an inviting colourful meanwhile space designed by Dallas-Pierce-Quintero for Enfield Council and Palace Gardens Shopping Centre. The Dugdale Centre, Museum of Enfield and EnFood sustainable café along with Pickled Pepper, a North London independent children's bookshop and theatre company will curate and activate the space together for the next 12 months.

Client: LB Enfield, Palace Gardens Shopping Centre, Pickled Pepper Books

Architect:
Dallas-Pierce-Quintero



Dalston Lane Terrace

68 Dalston Lane, London E8 3AH | Status: Built | Completion: 2019

Saving a severely dilapidated high street in Hackney by introducing 44 new homes and 1,000 sqm of retail space, Child Graddon Lewis' design has created a place that is historically authentic yet boldly contemporary. Through the redistribution of the mix of uses and access to them, the vitality of the high street and the peaceful amenity of the homes have been substantially enhanced. Not only has the permeability in the new design made the area much more desirable but it has dramatically enhanced the walk-through at the back of the buildings, making it safer and more comfortable.

Client: LB Hackney

Architect: Child Graddon Lewis

Contractor: Murphy Group



© Publica

Developing a Night Time Strategy

24 Hyde Park Ave, London N21 2PN | Status: Published | Completion: 2021

The GLA commissioned Publica to produce guidance for London boroughs outlining how to develop and deliver night time strategies. The guidance offers links to resources, step-by-step guides, recommendations, case studies and precedents from around the world. These provide ideas, examples and lessons learned on how recommended actions could be implemented and are based on extensive research and engagement with local authorities — presenting a clear case for extending the range and diversity of activities across the evening and night time.

Client:
Greater London Authority
Urban Designer and Consultant: Publica



© Buckley Gray Yeoman

Eccleston Yards

Eccleston Place, Victoria, Belgravia, London SW1W 9SA | Status: Built | Completion: 2018

Eccleston Yards redevelops a previously dormant car park and vacant set of five buildings and a car park in Victoria, opening them up into nineteen retail and gallery spaces. We also created a new public courtyard accessed from neighbouring streets through new pedestrian routes. The scheme repairs the urban fabric and creates an energetic co-working and retail hub for visitors and creative talent that champions the reuse of existing buildings in London.

Client:
Grosvenor Britain & Ireland
Architect:
Buckley Gray Yeoman
Structural Engineer:
Hurst Peirce + Malcom
Services Engineer:
Edward Pearce



Great Eastern Quays Phase 2

Royal Albert Dock, London | Status: Built | Completion: 2021

Great Eastern Quays Phase 2 contributes towards the evolving, vibrant and sustainable community in this historic riverside and dockside location. The scheme provides 468 new homes, 32 per cent of which are affordable, and 2,200 sqm of commercial units. Made up of eight buildings — from four to eleven storeys — the development is high density, providing high-quality homes within a traditional, urban structure. Public, private and communal spaces are clearly defined, each space with a specific character inspired by its location and proximity to the riverside or docks.

Client: Notting Hill Genesis
Architect: Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios
Structural Engineer: Conisbee
M&E / Sustainability Engineer: Calfordseaden
Planning Consultant: DP9
Cost Consultant: Arcadis
Contractor: Galliford Try



Hallsville Quarter

Minnie Baldock St, London E16 | Status: Under Construction | Completion: 2023

Linkcity is re-imagining this well-connected location in Canning Town with Hallsville Quarter, a vibrant centre with its own sense of place. Creating unique spaces with granite paving and cast stone leafy squares surrounded by masonry buildings housing 1,140 tenure blind new homes set around semi-private podium gardens. These are set above a diverse mix of retail, food and beverage, hotel, leisure, gym, a new arthouse style cinema and a new health centre for its residents, students and community workspaces.

Client: Linkcity
Architect: Hawkins \ Brown
Contractor: Bouygues UK



Harrow Road

Warwick Community Hall, 300 Harrow Rd, London W2 5HG | Status: Planning Granted | Completion: 2022

A residential-led, mixed-use scheme for Westminster City Council, Harrow Road is an ambitious project intrinsically focused upon placemaking and substantially enhancing the social environment for the community within the City. The building re-provisions existing community facilities, a nursery, new public realm, commercial spaces, and crucially 112 new homes—with 50 per cent genuinely affordable. Focusing upon the residential element of the project, all sit within a mixed schedule of accommodation ranging from studio to 3-bedroom apartments—with the majority of family-sized dwellings provided within the social tenure to support an identified need by the local authority.

Client: Westminster City Council
Architect: Child Graddon Lewis
M&E / Sustainability Engineer: Stantec
Contractor: Willmott Dixon
Project Manager: WSP
Landscape Architect: Allen Pyke Associates



Livesey Exchange

2248 St James's Rd, London SE16 3JH | Status: Proposed | Completion: 2021

LEX is delivering a community hub and workspaces for skill sharing on a currently vacant site in one of London's largest regeneration areas, Old Kent Road. The project was started by Nicholas Okwulu with what if: projects at the Ledbury Estate garages in 2006, and has evolved over several years of local engagement, fund raising and collaboration with businesses and local government. LEX demonstrates how long-term engagement and effective partnerships can secure space for local aspirations in a contested urban context.

Client: Livesey Exchange Ltd, Southwark Council
Architect: what if: projects Ltd
Structural Engineer: Techniker
M&E / Sustainability Engineer: Max Fordham
Quantity Surveyor: Stockdale
Acoustic Consultant: Max Fordham
Fire Engineer: Trenton Fire Ltd
Structural Engineer: Structure Workshop
Transport Consultant: Bespoke Transport Consulting



MM Ilford – Part of The SPARK

Chadwick Rd, Ilford IG1 | Status: Under Construction | Completion: 2021

MM will re-invent Redbridge Town Hall car-park creating a covered food market, promoting fresh food from local growers and encourage social enterprise with start-up food and beverage businesses. MM will provide a community space with a comprehensive engagement programme offering cooking classes, food growing, health and fitness classes, music and dance. The roof will contain poly-tunnels enabling experiments in urban food production. MM Ilford revolves around individuals: small-scale farmers, local producers and members of the local community.

Client: Mercato Metropolitano and LB Redbridge

Engineer: Webb Yates



Olympia London

Olympia Way, London W14 | Status: Under Construction | Completion: 2024

Regenerating the 14-acre Olympia site to protect its ability to host large-scale events, the project will also add live music venues, restaurants, theatres, cinemas, offices, retail and hotels. Crucially, it will reopen the impenetrable site to its community and visitors by dedicating 2.5 acres to public spaces and gardens — currently, you can only access 3 per cent of the site without an event ticket. A 200,000 sq ft logistics and vehicle centre will dramatically reduce the traffic congestion on Blythe Road and Olympia Way.

Client: Yoo Capital and Deutsche Finance International

Architect: Heatherwick Studio

Collaborating Architect: SPPARC

Heritage Consultant: Montagu Evans

Landscape Architect: LDA Design

Contractor: Laing O'Rourke

M&E / Sustainability Engineer: Desco

Structural Engineer: Robert Bird Group

Cost Consultant: Gardiner & Theobald LLP

Planning Consultant: Gerald Eve

Light Consultant: Studio Fractal



Olympic Steps

Olympic Way, Wembley Park, Wembley HA9 | Status: Built | Completion: 2021

The Olympic Steps upgrade the main entrance route up to the stadium at the end of Olympic Way, the primary pedestrian route from Wembley Park station. This new arrangement enlarges the public realm at ground level and creates a sheltered space for public events, such as live performances and covered markets. Expedition’s structural design ensured that the old entrance could be replaced in two phases, allowing major events to continue during the demolition and construction works.

Client: Quintain
Architect: vPPR
Structural Engineer: Expedition Engineering



One Crown Place

54 Wilson St, London EC2A 2ER | Status: Built | Completion: 2021

An entire urban block, where the City meets Hackney, is being transformed with a vibrant new frontage, as part of this mixed-use redevelopment. Some Georgian townhouses are repurposed into a boutique hotel, complete with street side shops and cafes, while a 1970s office block is assimilated, some new office and residential volumes are introduced, a Victorian facade is integrated, and a new central courtyard is created. This renewed urban plan integrates around an existing church and pub — a microcosm of London.

Client: MTD Group (Malaysia)
Architect: Kohn Pedersen Fox Associates
Project Manager: CBRE
Structural Engineer: AKT II
MEP: AECOM
Residential Amenity Interiors: Studio Ashby
Residential Interiors: Bergman Mar
Residential Interiors: Bowler James Brindley
Quantity Surveyor: Gardiner & Theobald LLP
Contractor: MACE
Artist: Stig Evans
3D Construction Visualisation: Disperse



Orangery Lane

159 Eltham High St, London SE9 1TW | Status: Planning Granted | Completion: 2022

Orangery Lane is an exemplar council housing scheme in Eltham. shedkm have crafted a sensitive and delightful new neighbourhood for future residents, focused on sustainability, well-being and generous outside amenity. shedkm hope to see No.20 Orangery Lane become a beacon of new placemaking in the area whilst providing much needed council homes in the borough. The scheme will regenerate underused links, routes and connections as part of Eltham High Street and its surrounding areas of historic importance.

Client:
RB Greenwich
Architect: shedkm
Construction: A&E Elkins



Oxford Street District Framework

264 Oxford St, London W1C 1DP | Status: Under Construction | Completion: 2021

Publica worked with Westminster City Council to produce an ambitious Framework for the Oxford Street District—setting out a strategy for the district’s recovery over the course of the next decade. In practice, it will deliver a step-change in the quality of the built environment, while providing access to a wider range of employment and leisure opportunities. This will be underpinned by world-class station interchanges, ease of active travel, a revitalised mix of uses and playful new public spaces.

Client:
Westminster City Council
Urban Designer and Consultant: Publica
Traffic and Transport Consultant:
Norman Rourke Pryme
Design Build Contractor:
Murphy Carey Joint Venture
Landscape Design Delivery:
BDP
Highways Design Delivery:
Arcadis
Stakeholder Engagement and Communications:
Coverdale Barclay



Peel Place

30 Lillie Rd, Hammersmith, London SW6 1TN | Status: Planning Granted | Completion: 2020

Peel Place delivers a mix of 308 homes (41 per cent affordable), new health centre, retail, gym and creative hub, all surrounding a new public square. The design incorporates the redevelopment of a council-owned site, with each block specifically orientated to draw people towards a new market square and inspire a sense of community. The entire scheme is designed around the concept of health and wellbeing; a theme visible via the architecture, choice of complementary uses and management strategy.

Client: Brent Council and Countryside Properties
Architect: Child Graddon Lewis
Planning Consultant: Turley
Other: AECOM
Structural Engineer: Price and Myers
Transport Consultant: Markides Associates
M&E / Sustainability Engineer: AWA



Purley Regeneration Framework

11 High St, Purley CR8 2AB | Status: Proposed | Completion: 2021

Purley Regeneration Framework is a community led vision for the future development of Purley. Multi-stranded interventions covered both sustainability and social equity throughout the plan and proposals that support: a rapidly changing diverse community; mental health through invigorating environments; physical health by ease of access for active travel through enhanced public spaces; improving environmental issues through community led greening; a welcoming reception through creative use of wayfinding; and entrepreneurial creativity through social and retail collaborations.

Masterplan: Urban Symbiotics
Landscape Architect: McGregor Coxall
Transport Consultant: Momentum Transport Planning
Planning Consultant: Graham Harrington
Sustainability: Gbolade Design Studio



Redchurch Street Activation Projects

Client: onRedchurch

Redchurch St, London | Status: Built | Completion: 2025

A programme of events to increase footfall post-COVID-19 focused on micro, low-cost projects that both celebrate the evolution of the neighbourhood and support retail recovery. A local creative committee drew all disciplines together (retail, advertising, hospitality, PR, architecture) to scope ideas. Digital window collaborations celebrate local artists, designers and makers, generate footfall for retailers, and saving on printed brochures by linking QR codes to online content. The programme culminated in a street festival, presenting Redchurch as an inclusive, usable space.



Roycraft House

Client:
LB Barking and Dagenham and
Be First

Linton Road, Barking IG11 | Status: Proposed | Completion: 2022

Roycraft House, a six-storey building in a prominent location in Barking town centre, will be transformed into affordable and inclusive workspaces for all. The building will become a focal point for local businesses and communities, serving as a testbed model of hybrid workspace. It is more than workspace—it is a destination generating excitement with a cultural hub for local community and visitors, delivering business space, jobs, event space, supporting the growth of the evening economy, community uses and much more.



Skate the Strand

Strand, London | Status: Built | Completion: 2021

In the heart of London on the Strand, Betongpark have created a bespoke series of skateable obstacles to inspire creativity and outdoor fun. Previously one of London’s most uninviting roads, the Strand is now home to a temporary skatepark open to all. Active lifestyles, community building and improved mental and physical wellbeing are among the benefits of the project, that brings colour and fun to central London.

Architect, Contractor, Project Manager: Betongpark Limited



South Molton Triangle

4 Davies Mews, London W1K 5AG | Status: Proposed | Completion: 2026

The South Molton Triangle is a mixed-use development in the heart of Mayfair’s conservation area. It will transform a prime, underutilised site into a high-end retail, office, and leisure community, and involves the re-use of listed buildings. A high-quality public realm, including new paving and landscaping, will create a new identity. As a result of the pandemic, increased ventilation has been added to improve air change rates, along with mixed mode ventilation and shared communal roof terraces for all staff.

*Client: Grosvenor Estate
Architect: Hopkins Architects Limited
Structural Engineer: AKT II
Planning Consultant: Gerald Eve*



Team Catford

17 Catford Broadway, London SE6 4SN | Status: Built | Completion: 2021

A neighbourhood pop-up shop which celebrates our beloved area and its community through an extensive range including Catford merchandise. It also acts as an outlet for Catford creatives and entrepreneurs who we have worked with on exclusive collaborations. Striving to be a place for community, House of Catford brings people together to shop, chat and engage as well as supporting local good causes.

Project Manager:
LB Lewisham



Temporary Scheme for North Audley Street

11 N Audley St, London W1K 6ZB | Status: Built | Completion: 2021

This temporary scheme for North Audley Street supports hospitality in the short term, while building upon Grosvenor's vision for the area as an outdoor dining destination. The temporary reduction of parking and loading and the widening of footways allows restaurants to spill out onto the street. Alongside the highways works, Publica worked with Landscape Architect Alexandra Noble to create outdoor 'dining rooms', using large containers with a planting scheme designed to maximise bio-diversity.

Client: Grosvenor
Landscape Designer:
Alexandra Noble
Transport Consultant: NRP
Highways contractor: MCJV
Landscape Contractor:
CLGardening
Project Manager:
Gardiner & Theobald LLP
Urban Designer: Publica



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The Department Store Studios

**19 Bellefields Rd, Ferndale, London SW9 9UH |
Status: Under Construction | Completion: 2021**

Designed and developed by Squire & Partners, The Department Store Studios is a new local workspace adjacent to the practice's refurbishment of The Department Store in Brixton. The new development creates a platform for growing businesses with flexible workspaces and a host of serviced social and meeting areas, alongside a programme of events curated to share skills, inspire creativity and expand local networks. The Studios is also home to Bellefields neighbourhood bar and restaurant and a screening room.

Client: Squire and Partners
Architect: Squire and Partners
Interior Designer:
Squire and Partners
Structural Engineer:
Elliott Wood



The Knightsbridge Estate

Sloane St, London | Status: Under Construction | Completion: 2022

Fletcher Priest's project is a major mixed-use development of a city block at the northern end of The Knightsbridge Estate. The scheme consolidates ground-floor retail spaces into larger, flagship-sized units and introduces luxury built-to-rent residential homes and workspaces above, bringing new liveliness to the area. The restored facades of the scheme are aligned vertically with the uses behind them into recognisable 'houses'. Repositioning Knightsbridge Tube Station entrance created a new, prominent corner flagship unit, now occupied by Burberry.

Client: Chelsfield
Architect:
Fletcher Priest Architects
Contractor:
Skanska Construction
Structural Engineer:
Waterman Group



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Twickenham Riverside

Diamond Jubilee Gardens, 3 The Embankment, Twickenham TW1 3DX | Status: Proposed | Completion: 2024

Twickenham Riverside will create a flourishing centre for the local area, where people can enjoy the beauty of the riverside. The post-pandemic world sees increased pressure on external spaces, with venues to host external activities particularly sought after. The design introduces 4000 sqm of public space to the embankment. Whilst the gardens provide areas for sitting and playing sports, the embankment can accommodate events such as concerts and markets. The scheme also introduces a riverside activity area for the community.

Client: Richmond Borough Council
Architect: Hopkins Architects Limited
Landscape Architect: LDA Design
Structural Engineer: Webb Yates
M&E Engineer: Skelly & Couch
Transport Consultant: WSP
Quantity Surveyor: Arcadis
Planning Consultant: Savills



© what if: projects

Waltham Forest Active Travel Centre

Walthamstow Central Station, Walthamstow, London E17 7LT | Status: Proposed | Completion: 2024

Integrated into the existing transport interchange of Walthamstow Central and linked to the expanding network of new cycle and walking routes, the proposed solar-powered Waltham Forest Active Travel Centre operates as a central base for secure cycle parking, local authority cycle hire, bike repair and a hub for the borough's Travel Behaviour Change Unit. 500+ cycle spaces, and accommodation for complementary educational programmes will facilitate and promote active travel, encouraging more multi-modal journeys across the borough and London.

Client: LB Waltham Forest
Architect: what if: projects
Structural Engineer: Techniker
M&E / Sustainability Engineer: Max Fordham
Transport Consultant: Bespoke Transport Consulting



Woolwich Elizabeth Line Station

Woolwich Church St, London, UK | Status: Built | Completion: 2021

The £140 million Woolwich Elizabeth line station is at the centre of a new masterplan transforming the Royal Arsenal site into 3,750 new homes with cultural, commercial and leisure quarters. Through WW+P's design work the station has been integrated into the area through the creation of a new public square, Dial Arch Square. Woolwich is the only Elizabeth line station that opens onto a public square lending a unique sense of arrival for visitors and residents alike.

Client: Crossrail Limited

Architect:
Weston Williamson+Partners

Contractor: Balfour Beatty

Engineer: Mott MacDonald

Endnotes

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New London Architecture, Resilient London, 2021: [Link →](#)



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