

# NLQ

NEW LONDON QUARTERLY  
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nla



## AGENDA SETTERS

The New London Agenda special | Graeme Craig | Claire Bennie | Jamestown's Michael Phillips | Jo Bacon | Elliott Wood | John Morden Centre



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## SETTING THE AGENDA



What sort of city do we want London to be? How can we turn around some of the capital's key problem areas—inequality, a lack of liveability, sustainability—and build on its fundamental advantages—its vibrancy, energy, culture and creativity?

That, in essence, is why NLA embarked on a journey with over 400 individuals and experts across its community, honing their views and ideas into the New London Agenda—a blueprint for the city that it is hoped will form the bedrock of output from developers, architects, local authorities and anyone else who is part of shaping a better city.

This issue of NLQ presents a special feature on the Agenda, talking to many of its key instigators and shapers to see what inspires them about its content, and crucially how that can be carried forward. People like Graeme Craig, whose Places for London will do so much to put placemaking principles into action, as one of the city's largest landowners and a real power-player in shifting perceptions. Expert Panel chairs have done a great deal to forge NLA thinking across all sectors—LCA's Jonny Popper presents the case for planning as it seeks fresh impetus. And later this year we will unveil a new competition to seek the best ideas to reinforce that trajectory and 'reimagine' London.

Housing is a key component of any functioning city. We look at temporary solutions, while Claire Bennie, a stalwart in fighting for better conditions across the sector, considers how new 'trees' can be grown as the current one—the system—withers and is allowed to die. As we approach MIPIM and Opportunity London's launch of a new investment prospectus, we talk to Jamestown boss Michael Phillips, whose firm's own brand of mixed-use urban regeneration that has transformed areas of New York and Rotterdam would not look out of place in a revitalised central London. Jace Tyrrell spells out what the prospectus is all about, too.

Retrofit, another key component of London's development in the coming decades, is part of Elliott Wood's armoury from its Building Society base. The engineer is deemed 'Top of their Game' this time, expertly profiled by Louise Rodgers.

Finally, we take a look at two key buildings with later living and care at their core—Mæ's Stirling Prize winner, the John Morden Centre, and Coffey Architects' Cobham Bowers. Both are taking care of their residents and the wider community, through high-quality architecture and sustainable development with wellbeing at their heart. In many ways, this is the New London Agenda, in action.

Enjoy the issue!

David Taylor, Editor

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London's built environment community



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Grant Smith; Phil Coffey; Jim Stephenson

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# THE QUARTER

A quick compendium of the more important stories affecting London development over the last few months

## BUILDINGS

Housing secretary Michael Gove approved Mitsubishi Estate London and CO-RE's **72 Upper Ground**, Make's controversial £400 million proposals to redevelop the former ITV Studios on London's South Bank. Regal London has submitted plans for the DSDHA-designed redevelopment of **100 Chalk Farm Road**, a 0.75-acre (0.3ha) site next to the grade II-listed Roundhouse. The scheme comprises four drum-shaped new blocks varying in height from six to 12 storeys, housing 265 student bedrooms, 24 affordable homes, nearly 9,000 sq ft (c. 836 sqm) of ground-floor commercial space, and new public realm along Chalk Farm Road. It is set to be one of the first UK purpose-built student accommodation projects with a WELL platinum accreditation. Related Argent opened **The 108**, a 40,000 sq ft (c. 3,715 sqm) indoor baseball and softball destination for year-round practice and coaching at Brent Cross Town. Seoul-based Korean architect Minsuk Cho and his firm Mass Studies were selected to design the 23rd **Serpentine Pavilion**, which will be unveiled on site in June. Entitled *Archipelagic Void*, the pavilion will consist of five 'islands' designed around an open space. Reselton won planning permission for the redevelopment of the **Stag Brewery** site in Richmond, with a 1,068-home scheme comprising 21 residential buildings, a school, care home, retail and leisure units. **Fenwick**, on Bond Street in Mayfair, closed its doors for the last time, with a group of a charities—Charity Super.Mkt—taking it over for a fortnight before an office-led redevelopment from Lazari Investments begins, designed by Foster and Partners. Henley Investment Management won consent for the redevelopment of **Albert and Swedish Wharf** in Fulham, one of the last remaining undeveloped riverside locations on the River Thames. The site will be transformed into a cluster of six to 17-storey residential buildings with 276 apartments designed by EPR Architects.

## COMPANIES AND REPORTS

NLA launched its **New London Agenda**—see special feature starting on page 10. Publica unveiled its **CIC campaign for inclusive cities**. Its first focus area is advancing gender inclusion and women's safety in public space—see [www.publica.co.uk/campaign](http://www.publica.co.uk/campaign) for details. Barratt Developments and Redrow announced a merger worth £2.5 billion to create the UK's largest housing developer. It will trade as **Barratt Redrow**. Timber

Development UK and Waugh Thistleton Architects produced a study on policies across the world which encourage the use of timber in construction. **'Timber Policy'** compares policies in six countries to act as a tool to support policy makers on the journey to decarbonising construction in the UK and beyond, which is currently falling short of addressing the urgency of the climate crisis, according to WT's Andrew Waugh. 'The book serves as a beacon of hope, illustrating how public-private partnerships can drive systemic change towards a sustainable future,' he said. **Grimshaw's** profits fell nearly 20 per cent over the past financial year, following a pause on work on its HS2 Euston terminus, although revenues grew by a third. The City of London Corporation's planning and transportation committee approved the draft **City Plan 2040**. **Brompton Bicycles** became a B Corp.

## PRIZES AND COMPETITIONS

RIBA awarded its **Royal Gold Medal** to Lesley Lokko, the first African woman to receive the honour. Known for her work as an architecture teacher and academic, 60-year-old Ghanaian-Scottish Lokko was also made an OBE in the New Year's Honours. The **Davidson Prize** has revealed its 2024 theme: 'rethinking home—adapt and reuse'. The £25,000 prize will be judged by Amandeep Singh Kalra, Annalie Riches, Alexander Turner, Duncan Campbell, Alice Finney and Miles Mitchell.

## PEOPLE

**Nicholas Hare**, who founded Nicholas Hare Architects in 1977 and was for many years an inspiring teacher at the School of Architecture in Cambridge, died aged 81. Architects **Patty Hopkins** and **Audley English** were made OBE and MBE respectively in King Charles' New Year Honours. **Gerald Ronson** received a knighthood and **Pat Brown** was also given an MBE for services to the built environment. Consultancy practice of the year, planning and development consultancy Lichfields, has promoted **Jennie Baker** to planning director in its London office, while **Nancy Stuart** and **Nuala Wheatley** have moved into associate director roles. **Rachele Caltagirone** was appointed head of placemaking at the Olympia Estate. The industry lost **Sarah Weir OBE**, former chief executive of the Design Council.

For more news, interviews and features, sign up to our New London Weekly newsletter at [nla.london](http://nla.london)



Make's 72 Upper Ground redevelopment of ITV Studios



Drum roll — DSDHA's 100 Chalk Farm Road for Regal London



Strike! Related Argent's The 108 at Brent Cross Town



Minsuk Cho's Serpentine Pavilion design



Henley's EPR Architects-designed Albert and Swedish Wharf



Rethinking home — the Davidson Prize's new theme



Nicholas Hare, 1942–2024





Chopping and changing — Hawkes’ eye view on the capital

# LONDON FROM THE SKY

Aerial photographer Jason Hawkes has unveiled images charting change from the sky

Aerial photographer Jason Hawkes has unveiled these images of development in the City of London, showing how the cluster has grown in under 13 years.

‘I’m always amazed when I’m on the ground in the City of London about how little you can actually see of all the incredible changes taking place,’ he says of the photographs, which were taken in August 2010 and May 2023.

New schemes on the skyline include many which have acquired nicknames such as the Scalpel, Walkie Talkie or Cheesegrater, with others including 22 Bishopsgate, and will be joined by 11 further new skyscrapers by 2030.

‘From 2,000ft up, orbiting the City, you get a real overview of what’s happening—and just how quickly.

It’s always so interesting looking down into the huge foundations being dug and then seeing the buildings rise over the years.’

Hawkes first flew over London aged 22 when he was producing a book of aerial views for the publisher Random House. ‘Looking back at those images, the capital almost looks like a different city—it’s incredible how low-rise things were then.’

Elsewhere in the capital, Hawkes says the changes are similarly noticeable. ‘The skyline at Vauxhall, for example, is unrecognisable and lots of those changes have happened in the past six years. There are towers everywhere now, mostly residential.’ ●



Before: the City of London’s eastern cluster of tall buildings pictured in August 2010...



...and after, with its notable new arrivals including 22 Bishopsgate, pictured last summer

Jason Hawkes



# POST-COLONIAL ARCHITECTURE

*Peter Murray OBE takes a trip to Sri Lanka to witness the work of Geoffrey Bawa and reflect on how decolonisation influences architecture*



A trip to Sri Lanka and the announcement that Leslie Lokko is to receive the Royal Gold Medal prompted me to ponder on post-colonialism and the impact discussions about decolonisation have on architecture.

Lokko got the award because she has devoted her career to amplifying under-represented voices and examining the complex relationship between architecture, identity and race. RIBA honours committee praised her struggle to democratise architecture as a ‘clarion call for equitable representation in policies, planning, and design that shape our spaces’.

Her Venice Biennale celebrated Africa as the crucible of the future. Her teaching in the UK, US and Africa aimed to democratise, decolonise and progress architectural education.

One of the exhibits that caught my eye at Venice was that of the ‘tropical modernist’ projects by Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew, tucked away in an exhibition by the V&A. Using adjustable louvres, wide eaves, brise soleils, cross-ventilation and heavy concrete structures, Fry and Drew produced climate-friendly buildings that functioned effectively in the pre-AC era. Following independence, President Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana saw tropical modernism as an expression of his pan-African ideology, and commissioned architects from Russia instead to build such structures as beacons for a free Africa. The V&A’s curator described the Venice exhibition thus: ‘It considers the power of architecture, both as a means of colonial suppression and a symbol of nascent political freedom, as well as exploring the specific legacy of tropical modernism in West Africa.’ The implication being that in the hands of Fry and Drew, tropical modernism was an architecture of oppression; under Nkrumah it became a symbol of progress.

Indeed, while Fry and Drew’s work responded to local climates, it did little to reflect local cultures. The concept of ‘critical regionalism’, coined by Kenneth Frampton and Alexander Tzonis in their 1981 essay *Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance*, was a reaction against the blandness of the burgeoning international style. Frampton argued that critical regionalism should not be confused with a nostalgic or sentimental revival of vernacular forms, but rather a critical and creative adaptation of local traditions and values to contemporary conditions and challenges.

The six points of CR include culture and civilisation, place and space, tectonic and scenographic, light and shadow, topography and landscape, and public and private. Critical regionalist architects, in Frampton’s view, included Alvar Aalto, Mario Botta, Rafael Moneo, Glenn Murcutt, Ken Yeang and WOHA Architects.

Geoffrey Bawa, Sri Lanka’s most celebrated architect and the reason for my trip to the island, failed to make the first edition of Frampton’s book but was added to the second. His architecture sought to blend modern architectural principles with traditional tropical design elements, such as natural ventilation, shading and the use of local materials.

Bawa’s architecture was often site-specific, integrating the natural landscape and topography into the design, creating a sense of harmony between the built environment and nature. This was most noticeable in the landscaping of his estate at Lunuganga, where I was lucky enough to stay during my time on the island. The estate owed much to English landscape—Capability Brown and Repton would have felt at home here, despite the tropical plants—and although a Sri Lankan, Bawa had a colonial air. Stinking rich, he turned up to his interview at the Architectural Association in a 1934 Rolls Royce Drophead Coupe.

Bawa’s designs often featured open-plan layouts, courtyards and gardens that seamlessly blended indoor and outdoor spaces. He emphasised the importance of spatial quality, light and ventilation in his designs, creating comfortable and liveable spaces that were well-suited to the tropical climate.

Bawa mentored and inspired a generation of architects and designers in Sri Lanka and beyond, who embraced his principles of tropical modernism and environmental sensitivity.

In Colombo, I met up with Milinda Pathiraja of RAW (Robust Architecture Workshop), who represents a post-Bawa generation whose work investigates the role of architects as facilitators of construction and development policies, with a focus on ESG.

Pathiraja’s Community Library at Ambepussa, for instance, was built by soldiers returning from the civil war (1983 until 2009). The architects’ role focused as much on the building process as on the building as a physical artefact. It aimed to overcome the general de-skilling of the construction workforce and promote the army’s participation in post-war



Design driver — Sri Lankan architect Geoffrey Bawa’s Rolls Royce in his house in Colombo, now a popular tourist attraction

reconstruction. The design included numerous crafty details that disguised the soldiers’ rough workmanship.

**‘Bawa’s architecture sought to blend modern architectural principles with traditional tropical design elements’**

Peter Murray

RAW’s office is on the top floor of one of their recent buildings, with a spectacular view across Colombo. You can see the new observation tower built by the Chinese called the Lotus. It has a vivid green stem and bright pink flower—Foster’s Tulip is a shrinking violet in comparison. In the distance, the Chinese are expanding the port and building the luxury Port City on 269 hectares of reclaimed land.

Sri Lanka has been occupied by the Portuguese, the Dutch and the British—are the Chinese next, or even the Indians? Russia and China are investing across Africa. What role will architecture play in this latest phase of colonisation? ●





# THE NEW LONDON AGENDA SPECIAL

*Sadie Morgan OBE* introduces a special feature on NLA's framework for best practice in city-making — taken from 18 years of experience in London, and with direct contributions from over 400 people across public, private and charitable sectors

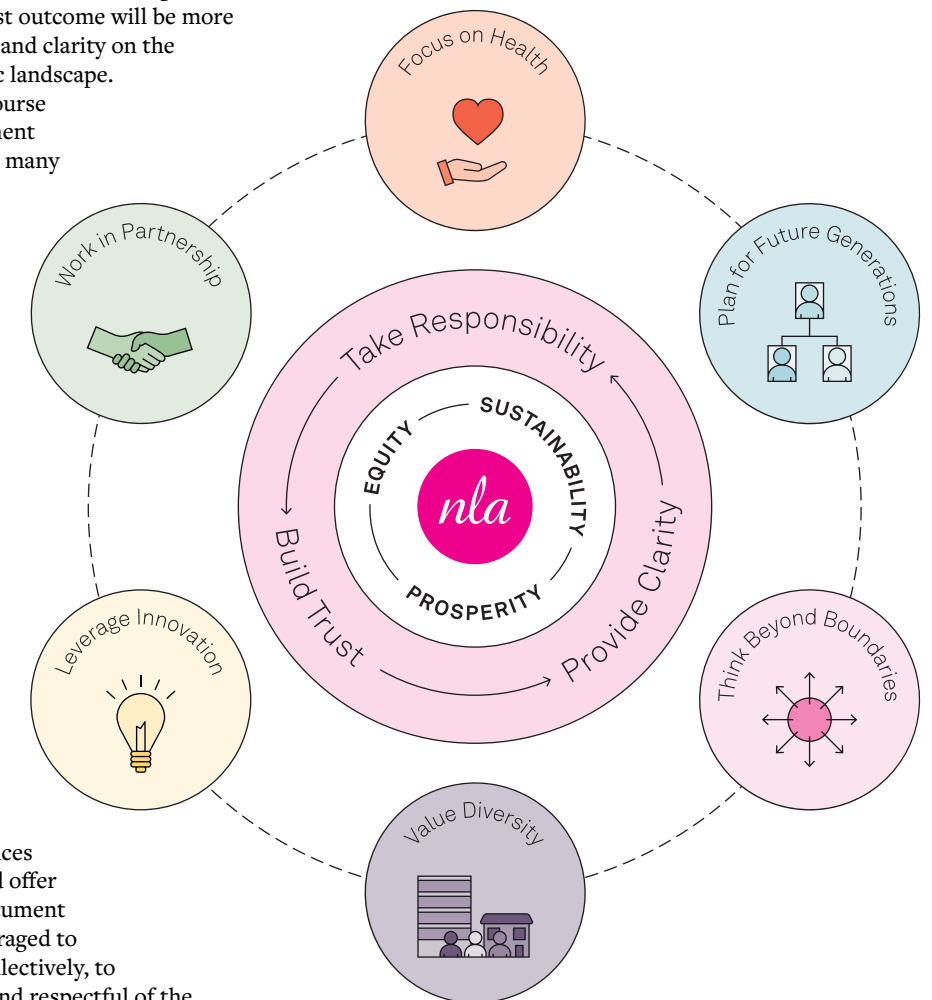


This year will be a pivotal moment for London, with a mayoral election in May and a general election not far behind. Regardless of the result, the best outcome will be more long-term certainty and clarity on the policy and economic landscape.

Politics is of course only one factor. As the built environment community, we are having to adapt to many things: huge changes to working and lifestyle patterns; attitudes to safety; the urgent requirement to address climate change; increasing societal inequalities; changing public trust in the industry; and a step change in both the nature and costs of financing and construction. The list goes on and on, and it is hard not to feel dispirited at the enormity of the task ahead.

Thankfully London is a city with a unique and seemingly inexhaustible ability to reinvent and renew itself—but it needs our help. This is exactly what NLA's 'New London Agenda' sets out to do, by offering a practical guide for actors in the built environment to deliver the best outcomes for those that live, work and visit London, and invest in it over the long-term.

Written by a diverse range of voices who identify the challenges ahead and offer ideas on ways to tackle them, this document leaves you feeling inspired and encouraged to take responsibility, personally and collectively, to build a London fit for all its citizens and respectful of the world's limited resources.



Left to right: Greg Clark, Graeme Craig, Sadie Morgan, Kat Hanna, Richard Meier, Jules Pipe and Kemi Oguntoye

Read the New London Agenda at [nla.london](https://nla.london)



# WHAT INSPIRES YOU ABOUT THE NEW LONDON AGENDA?



**Jules Pipe CBE**  
Deputy mayor of  
London for planning,  
regeneration and skills

The New London Agenda is a huge opportunity to drive forward positive change in how the built environment sector serves Londoners. It is not a singular view but a co-produced tool that has already demonstrated that the industry can collaborate and pull focus around a common mission. The process of production shows us what is possible when we work together.

This is a timely intervention as we head towards a new mayoral cycle. At the GLA we have embarked on an ambitious programme of engagement to inform a new London Plan, including a shared engagement programme serving both our Planning for London programme and the New London Agenda. Concurrently, we must continue to address the acute challenges facing the city that cannot wait.

The New London Agenda sets out a series of core principles that we can all get behind. Change in our city needs to respond to the climate emergency. Change needs to embed equity, inclusivity and prosperity. Change needs to address societal and spatial injustices. Change needs to recognise the different needs of Londoners from all backgrounds. And change needs to involve more people in the authorship of the built environment, which is of course only possible with a more representative built environment sector.

I appeal to everyone involved in shaping the built environment—across our collective expertise in planning, design, decision-making, development and construction—to utilise this important tool, adopt this way of working and commit to collaborating around the common goal of a city for all Londoners.



**Jo Negrini**  
Director, Arup

Equity is at the heart of the New London Agenda. This recognises that cities are people and that those people who plan, design and intervene in the built environment have an inherent responsibility to ensure that the places we create deliver a sense of belonging and contribute to tackling deep-seated inequalities in London.

There must also be a recognition that cities can fail. San Francisco, once the nexus of the booming tech sector and a global city, is in the grip of an unfolding humanitarian disaster. It is a city hollowed out by COVID, rough sleeping, a drug crisis, corporate fear, a middle-class exodus—huge swathes of the city where people don't feel safe to inhabit. It is estimated that more than 250,000 people have left the city since the beginning of 2020, with UCLA research indicating this resulted in a \$7 billion net income loss within the city.

The warning signs are in London too. For many Londoners, life is tough and getting tougher. We talk about the cost-of-living crisis, but normally with crises, there is a response. We have proved, time and time again, as a city, that we are resilient and we can respond. We need to act to solve this current crisis and put equity and social justice as the cornerstone of our response.

This is not just the moral thing to do, it is essential to the future of London.



**Professor Greg Clark**  
Urbanist and writer

The physical fabric of our cities is made up of property and infrastructure. Over decades, this fabric accumulates layers of history and meaning, which resonate and shape the lives and opportunities of our people. In our current times, this fabric is shifting from being seen as a 'passive asset class' to becoming a dynamic and 'active ingredient' in how cities work, the agility and resilience they can attain, and the experiences and connections they can curate. We need this more intentional approach.

Our built environment shapes our city, and determines how, and how far, we will live, work and play together, and whether we can adjust to planetary imperatives and the new opportunities from discovery and creation. London's unique skill is the ability to pioneer, reinvent and scale innovations into new systems and platforms that the whole world can use. So, an agenda for London that did not embrace the built environment would not be coherent or convincing.

In the recent past, London's built environment has manifested this reinvention capability through 30 years of celebrated regeneration. But it has also demonstrated the failure to build a city that works for everyone that is both affordable and accessible. Moreover, the recent pandemic revealed the injustice between the 'space rich' and the 'space poor' in deeply unacceptable ways. The seeds of positive change can now emerge, and we must nurture and promote new models globally. The New London Agenda condenses all of this into a common purpose, through which can together shape a better city.







**Binki Taylor**  
Founding partner,  
the Brixton Project

The New London Agenda is a response to the seismic challenges of our time, serving as a call to action for the built environment community to recalibrate its values around people, place and planet. The widening disparities in quality of life, health outcomes and the overall well-being of Londoners highlights the critical role the sector can take in delivering a future city that is welcoming, inclusive, safe and prosperous, while actively addressing the challenges of inequality and the planet’s finite resources. Central to this is foregrounding the experience of London’s communities, working in collaboration with other sectors to ensure the health, wellbeing and equality of life for our communities is prioritised.

It is a multi-functional toolkit—supporting the industry to navigate a complex shift with a clear and simple framework for realising and sharing best practice, while showing compelling leadership for the industry to evolve and adapt with clear purpose and intention.

Its commitment to showing London and Londoners that the industry is open, collaborative and responsible in building for the future is inspiring and bold. After decades of dwindling trust and negative perceptions, the New London Agenda will be a powerful tool for amplifying the voice of Londoners, in dialogue with the industry, about how together we shape a built environment for London that nurtures a healthy society.

This is a tool for everyone, and I look forward to the potential for practice and policy to evolve in more inclusive and innovative ways with this guidance in place.



**Carlo Castelli**  
Founder,  
Urban Purpose

The New London Agenda emerges as a vital, innovative approach to urban development, establishing a visionary framework for future city planning and regeneration. It focuses on themes crucial to urban thinking, aiming to reframe the value created for and within our cities, particularly for local communities and Londoners.

London, always a hub of innovative urban development approaches, sets a global benchmark. By reimagining success metrics, it fosters unprecedented value and models for sustainable city life. This transformation, aimed at reshaping London, also inspires communities worldwide. It showcases how urban spaces can evolve to meet modern challenges of competitiveness, while being inclusive and preserving unique cultural and historical identities.

At the heart of the New London Agenda is a renewed social contract, emphasising equity, sustainability and prosperity. This is crucial in addressing inequalities and promoting inclusive growth. It serves as a blueprint for London to flourish, ensuring local communities can benefit from London’s success and contribute to the urban development process.

The agenda’s innovative framework is an inspiration, advocating comprehensive change and collaboration. It adopts a holistic approach to urban development, integrating economic, environmental, social and cultural factors towards a ‘purpose case approach’. This inclusive model leads to balanced, sustainable urban growth, motivating cities globally to embrace similar strategies for multifaceted development. We need a paradigm shift, and this is what the New London Agenda can bring about.



**Sunand Prasad**  
Principal,  
Perkins & Will

In the cacophony of polarised voices and accelerating instability that surrounds us, we need to find calm centres that help us identify actions and focus energies to best effect. In the context of this city that we love, the New London Agenda provides such a space, and more. It is a provisional but well-surveyed road map to enable anyone in the built environment community to locate themselves in the collective effort that is needed to make the best of the next and critical phase in the evolution of London. And, by the way, ‘anyone in the built environment community’ means, potentially, every citizen.

There are many things here to inspire. One example is the identification of health as a prime driver. The health of citizens in its literal, everyday meaning is directly influenced by the design of the built environment and will increasingly be impacted by the climate emergency. The urgency of action in response to the environmental crisis will be the defining feature of the next phase of London’s evolution that is at the core of the New London Agenda. Innovation, also highlighted, will be critical to success, not as the technocratic cliché it often becomes, but as an enquiring, principled and imaginative mindset that is needed more than ever.



**Richard Meier**  
Co-founder and CEO,  
Stories

Our industry finds itself in a tricky predicament. Many aspects *feel* and indeed *are* broken. We are struggling to make things happen at anywhere near the rate they should, and it is challenging to deliver much-needed social and environmental outcomes to boot.

The New London Agenda is inspiring as it brings real focus to the notion of a new social contract in the built environment. It’s a move that I strongly support and something which I think our industry has not really grappled with to date.

The Agenda ‘grasps the nettle’ and sets out a framework against which we can convene and take action—ultimately around how we go about doing business *better*, and how we better share our risks, resources and responsibilities.



**Lucy Musgrave**  
Founding director,  
Publica

The New London Agenda has framed a moment of reflection, co-designed by many players with a cross-industry urgency about what this great city needs as we transition to net zero, address intractable inequalities and identify new ways of working and new opportunities. I hope all audiences understand the consensus we have reached in our objective to make a fairer and more equitable city that looks carefully at the process of urban change. Over many generations exclusion and bias have been built in because of top-down, technocratic decision-making which misses the opportunity to understand our distinct neighbourhoods and communities. To be able to deliver the right urban development we need multiple perspectives to create the right briefs.

The conversation that I hope will flourish from these essays and discussions will look carefully and precisely at what skills and roles are needed (these may not even exist yet) and how we can mainstream our expectations, policy development and civic leadership to include all citizens. This cannot be done without an intersectional understanding of public space and all infrastructures. We need to care and repair, and create welcoming, diverse, safe, accessible and attractive neighbourhoods, where everyone can feel they belong. Action is needed on complex and nuanced topics in practical and measurable ways. All players, policymakers, investors, designers, managers and civic leaders can articulate their role, impact and accountability for an inclusive city. This is a really exciting field in urbanism, but everyone needs to step up. If we do, I truly believe London can lead this global conversation.



**Debbie Jackson**  
Executive director —  
regeneration, economy  
and planning,  
Westminster City  
Council

We need the New London Agenda because the challenge, and therefore the solution, is complex. The built environment sector—across the private, public and community sectors—is equally complex, and of course part of a wider system. In a world craving binary solutions and less ‘noise’ we need to take responsibility for working through, and not dismissing, that complexity and arriving at tangible, implementable solutions that reflect our role, and the voice and needs of London’s diverse communities.

The agenda acknowledges our post-pandemic-behaviour-change-inequality-climate-crisis pivot point. It reflects that we’ve learnt a lot, we need to do things differently and that collectively we have an important role to play. Already, the agenda reveals fresh thinking and tangible ideas hewn from round tables of talent, organised around pillars that will be familiar to us all. I’m excited to see this thinking evolve into collaboration and action.

But, for me, at this point, those core values of taking responsibility, providing clarity and building trust really resonate. Helpfully memorable, my hope is that we hold each other to account to uphold those values in all we do, from a micro to a macro level. If you’ll excuse the industry pun, this will give us the strongest of foundations upon which to rise to the challenge set by the agenda to help shape a city of equity, sustainability and prosperity. ●





# THE NEW GREAT ESTATE-MAKER

*David Taylor meets Places for London chief executive Graeme Craig, one of the major voices in NLA's New London Agenda and the capital's biggest developer, focused on long-term stewardship and placemaking*

'At the heart of what we're doing,' says Places for London boss Graeme Craig, 'is creating a new Great Estate in London, with assets across the capital.'

It's an impressive and laudable aim. For the recently rebranded organisation he runs, this translates into building some 20,000 new homes and 600,000 square feet of workspace, targeting net zero carbon by 2030.

But what Pfl does in South Kensington, say, is not the same as what it will bring forward in Kidbrooke, or north Greenwich, or indeed any one of dozens of other sites across London it is taking charge of. 'We will be doing more development than anyone in London for decades to come,' says Craig. Which puts him right up there with the most powerful and influential people in the contemporary property scene.

We meet in Victoria, which itself will be the subject of considerable change over the coming years. There are plans to 'think beyond the red line' of what each organisation in the area owns, thinking 'creatively' about the Victoria coach station and its current location, and work with the best development team to find 'the right answer for London'.

Craig suggests that much of the work will be on land it owns. But despite Pfl's growing influence, it will increasingly focus on convening other landowners, particularly those in the public sector. 'It will be about understanding how we, between us, can think beyond the red line of what we individually work on and understand how we might work together to bring forward the homes, particularly the affordable homes, that London needs. But also, the workspace, including affordable workspace, and to think beyond that in terms of the infrastructure that London needs.'

Craig's career trajectory is a fascinating one, offering nuggets and clues as to what he might become, even from an early age, when playing the SimCity computer game was a particular delight. As a schoolchild, he was good at science and found himself drifting towards medicine, even though he wasn't entirely sure he wanted to be a doctor. But along came Edinburgh University, where he reasoned that a course in the discipline would open up lots of opportunities.

'After five years, not only did I not want to be a doctor, or a psychiatrist, or do medical journalism or medical

accountancy, which at one point I thought about. I didn't want to do any of those, and I never wanted to watch *Casualty* again in my life.'

So, he left with a BSc as a 'consolation prize'. Medicine didn't appeal, unlike his fellow students who were all in that line because of family connections or because they had a calling, based on bandaging up their teddy bears or Action Man. But just patching people up continually wasn't for him. Cities, he would find later, more so.

He found himself in administration, a low-level maternity-cover job in television licensing which involved feeding in the data from people who knocked on doors across Edinburgh to see if residents were watching the gogglebox legally or not. After five years of studying something he didn't want to study, keying in such details was the least he could do. He ended up running the TV licensing operation after a variety of interim steps, including being a PA, an auditor and head of customer services, opening new call centres and running their telephony systems. He had gone from the lowest rung on the ladder to being in charge of 1,000 people. Then came a job in Bristol as an audit assistant and a spell at Capita where he was doing programme and project management.

The year was 2004 and Craig was about to get married, resolving too to move to London: now or never. It was at this point that the big change came. He applied for and got a job with Transport for London, running the congestion charging operation—collecting payments, dealing with phone calls and correspondence, making it efficient and as seamless and customer-focused as possible. 'That's one of the things that I enjoyed about those jobs, and still do enjoy about those kinds of environments—you're in a customer service role.' The fact that it is a purchase people don't really want to make was another reason why, he felt, it should be as smooth a process as possible. Craig's work on transport-related activity here was good preparation for getting involved with pre-Olympics London and helping to transform a TfL that had three separate parts—rail, underground and surface, each with their own finance and HR functions—into a completely rethought organisation that was 'joined up' for the first time.

At the time, TfL had a commercial development side—effectively running its car parks—which became Craig's



responsibility. ‘Somewhat under sufferance, I agreed to pick up responsibility, initially on a temporary and part-time basis, little realising that I had actually stumbled on one of the most interesting jobs in London.’

It was also the first time Craig could see the extent of TfL’s land ownership, reigniting those early SimCity desires. He established that there were some 5,500 acres (2,226ha) of land in London under TfL’s ownership—or one-and-a-half per cent of London’s land mass. ‘I know we’re a transport organisation. But if you own this much land, you’re also a property company. We should accept that. We should embrace it. We should set ourselves up the way that property companies set up. And that really is the genesis of everything that followed.’

One of the first big decisions Craig had to make was about the sale of Earls Court, where he refused to go along with the received wisdom—that is, pure disposal. I remember thinking: ‘This makes no sense at all. Why shouldn’t we retain an involvement—participate and shape this in a way that reflects what we want to do as a transport organisation. But more broadly, surely, we should be participating in a way that reflects what it is that London needs.’

A company was set up—TTL Properties (TTLP)—to deal with the shareholding, which signalled for the first time that they wanted to participate long-term in its development, rather than simply sell out and walk away.

Today, Places for London is the reworked organisation, and was the first name it came up with. ‘I think we’re doing what it says on the tin,’ he explains. ‘We’re about places, we’re about placemaking, and we’re doing it actually not just in London, but for London.’ It’s not about distancing itself from TfL—Craig believes it is important that people realise TfL wholly owns PfL. But the money it makes gets reinvested back into the transport network.

The name was focus-grouped, and Craig found it interesting that those who were due to be on it were immediately hostile once they found out they would be involved in naming a property or development company, not least because of the perception that what they deliver is unaffordable, and they don’t care about the long-term. But when it was explained that this development company was owned by TfL the atmosphere changed. The roundel is respected, and as long as we respect that, we would not go far wrong, Craig says. ‘That’s a fantastic strength to build on.’ People were also positive about the organisation and the fact that they would be bringing forward affordable homes and workspace. ‘We are a wholly owned commercial property company, but with a strong social ethos to make sure that we’re focused on doing the right thing for London.’

Given that focus group, is there a job to be done in communicating what Pfl does to the public? Craig believes this is ‘absolutely essential’ and is part of the reason why he is personally so keen on NLA’s New London Agenda. ‘I think we, as an industry, spend a lot of time talking to ourselves. We persuade ourselves we do a good job; we don’t do a good job persuading Londoners.’ The industry needs to be held to account more, but also could do with being more joined up, he suggests. Hence why so much of Pfl’s role is about convening, helping to address a skills gap by getting involved in training, or engaging with schoolchildren across the capital.

It has talked to more than 2,000 school kids across 11 schools about development in London, even setting up a shadow board, running workshops (including on creating safe spaces for teenage girls) and organising work placements. All of this should help dispel the notion that development is something that is done to people rather than for them.

I ask about a line in Pfl’s marketing material that says it is here for a ‘greener, kinder, and more connected London’. What does this mean?

Craig responds by saying that Pfl’s job is to deliver what London needs at a local level—to say it has 5,500 acres is a lot less tangible for people than the fact that Pfl owns the row of shops at the end of their street, or the car park next to the station they use every day, he says. ‘We have to make sure that we deliver on the ground something that is fit for purpose, that reflects that local community. We cannot ever be an absentee landlord. We have to care deeply about every single one of our 1,500 tenants; we have to care deeply about ensuring that we create an organisation that reflects the diversity of London.’ This last point extends to the team, too, and the marketing blurb relates too to being a kind organisation in the sense that it is trying to do the right thing, leveraging the fantastic asset base.

# ‘Part of the job is just making sure that we keep it simple, we crack on and we get stuff done’

Metrics are important too—Pfl supports science-based targets on its environmental agenda, with a sustainable development framework (comprising 93 KPIs) it uses for all its projects. This cannot be a tick-box exercise. ‘As they say, culture eats strategy for breakfast.’

How does Craig describe his job to a layperson at a dinner party? ‘I will say that I run the property company that is responsible for managing and developing TfL’s land holdings across London,’ he begins. ‘I tell them that we’ll build 20,000 homes over the next 10 years. I tell them we’ve got 1,500 commercial tenancies, 95 per cent of which are small businesses. I tell them that I’ve got one of the best jobs in London. There’s nothing particularly esoteric, difficult or necessarily complex about what I do. I think for me, and the team, part of the job is just making sure that we keep it simple, we crack on and we get stuff done.’

Pfl currently has 3,250 homes under construction, having completed 800, and will have around 8,000 homes going in for planning this year. It is working with Grosvenor and others at Victoria, looking at its island site, the mainline station, coach station and bus station, and how that all might work better together, at the same time as working at Stratford and at Waterloo. Those are just three of over 50 sites. I suggest it’s a little like his surgical background, patching up and revitalising the city.

How is London now compared to where it might be in five years’ time? ‘What’s the phrase? The future is here, it’s just unevenly distributed. I think there are brilliant examples



Bollo Lane in Acton, west London, where Ealing Council has approved a masterplan for a HOK-designed live-work community of 852 homes



Arch angels — Pfl is keen on the regenerative power of reusing London’s old railway arches, of which it has 850 across the capital





Blackhorse View – PfL and Barratt London’s Walthamstow car-free scheme of 350 new homes, 50% of which are affordable, was created on a former car park site



Craig takes the stand at the New London Agenda launch with Kat Hanna, Richard Meier, Kemi Oguntoye and Sadie Morgan

as to all London needs.’ One is the King’s Cross transport interchange, of course, while another is the fantastic scheme completed at London Bridge, Craig feels. There are great social value projects happening across the capital, too, but affordable homes provision is at crisis point. Pfl’s job is in part to demonstrate what good looks like and to leverage that.

Railway arches are a particular interest, with work being done in Kilburn to open up, in tandem with the community, a row of inward-looking arches. But Craig believes there needs to be more investment in transport infrastructure without needing to keep having to make the case. ‘We as a country should understand the fact that you get multiples of the return by investing in infrastructure, and on a small scale that can be step-free access at a station.’ On the former, Craig means projects like Crossrail, the Northern Line Extension and their undoubted impact on housing and growth—and after all, we are 100 years on from Metroland. And on the latter, one of his proudest achievements was finally getting planning consent on appeal at South Kensington for a development which is more accessible and fitting for what should be ‘the jewel in the London Underground crown, reflecting the glories of the museums and institutions’ above.

There are 850 Kilburn-style arches in 21 key locations that Pfl is looking to re-use. ‘Arches are great,’ says Craig. ‘A brilliant asset class. There’s just something—whether it’s the size, the shape, the ambience, the connection with the transport network. I find it impossible not to smile.’ There is always a story too, he goes on, from people using arches as a base for converting VW camper vans, to mechanics or food production, to other vital community services providing the character backbone to places.

On a larger scale there is the Earls Court site bordered by three tube stations—West Brompton, West Kensington and Earls Court—and another case where Craig and his team were keen to stay involved rather than sell off and retreat. The new masterplan for the site (‘Bringing the wonder back’) is a far cry from Capco’s early moves, which had over 4,000 car parking spaces. This new Earls Court is car-free, a 40-acre (16ha) mixed-use scheme which the Earls Court Development Company aims to blend with the areas surrounding it. ‘I think we’re working well with that company, and it is an example of an organisation with common ambitions and which wants to do the right thing.’ Consultation is under way, and a planning application is expected probably toward the middle of this year. ‘You’ve got the chance really to do something which I hope will be still authentically London but reflect how London needs to look feel and function in the decades ahead,’ Craig adds.

In a way, he suggests, it is a shame that it is not the government thinking about decades in advance and what is right for UK plc, but actually commercial organisations taking on that mantle. They are the ones who believe it is the right thing to do to look 10, 20, 30 or 50 years hence, rather than just the next quarter, looking to ESG and making the case for long-term investment. And so, we’re back where we started: Places for London as a Great Estate—the subject of a new book from NLA too—and custodian of an impressively large amount of the capital’s future development. ‘I’m very keen that we do work with the best,’ says Craig. ‘And that we collaborate in a way in which we demonstrate, ultimately, the right answer for London. That really sits at the heart of what we want to achieve.’ ●



# MEET THE EXPERT

*David Taylor talks to London Communication Agency’s Jonny Popper to get the lowdown on all things planning as part of his chairmanship of the Expert Panel group on the subject*

**David Taylor: Jonny, Hello!**

**Jonny Popper:** Hi David!

**DT: Congratulations on your period as chair of the planning group. What would you say are the three things that have arisen from your time as chair that stick in the mind and are key takeaways for people who aren’t aware of what this Expert Panel does?**

**JP:** Well, I suppose it’s a general statement that goes across everything, but the first thing is that over the three years it’s been a brilliant group of people to get together. The representation on the panel has been cross-sector—really senior people, really interesting people, and really nice people. We’ve had local authority heads of planning, senior heads of planning within the private sector, architects, lawyers and consultants. We’ve had quite a few different viewpoints and aspects to it all, which is a really good conversation to have. So, that has been interesting. In terms of moments that have been interesting, I mean, obviously, in the first year we were all very excited by the planning-reform-led-by-Jenrick days. We were very active—we led a survey of members, and we put in a response to it. I had my own personal views on it, that it was pretty nuts. And it was quite reassuring and interesting to hear that absolutely everybody else thought it was nuts as well! Certainly, in London. That was also backed up by the members, though obviously the feedback that we submitted was much more diplomatic than simply telling the government: ‘This is nuts.’ We were much more constructive. And there were some things in there that were helpful, but I mean, the overall thrust of it was... interesting. So that first year was quite focused around that, particularly from the planning perspective. Other moments? It was really interesting as well to see, looking back on it now amusingly, that when Michael Gove was first appointed, we were all quite excited to have him, partly because we were all quite excited to see the back of Robert Jenrick, who clearly was not... well, certainly took some interesting decisions. So, I think when he left it was perceived to be a positive move, and when Gove came in, that was seen to be a big-hitter coming in. Now, I think probably most of us have a different view, some time on, as to what he has been able to achieve, and how he has affected the industry. We’ve had some really interesting debates about social value and community consultation. And then there have been lots of individual moments of just learning around the table with things that you just didn’t realise were the case. When you suddenly get the script, you think you know quite a lot about planning, and then you hear comments made that

change your perspective. So, from that perspective it has been very interesting.

**DT: Can you think of one of those, off the top of your head?**

**JP:** Well at the last one... A simple one. I hadn’t realised the heads of planning were saying: ‘You know, the government’s just increased the planning fees that developers were going to pay, partly as a way of helping to fund planning departments, those planning fees are not ring-fenced.’ So, all the planning department heads of planning were saying it won’t actually do anything to increase the number of planners, because that’s just going to go into the general local authority pot and be spent on other things. And I was also like: ‘Oh, God, I hadn’t realised that.’ (Laughs) Sort of saying we’re quite willing to pay more fees, if it leads to a better service, but the way it was being done... I know there have been some announcements just now in the autumn statement, but the previous announcement of an additional level of service you can pay, for but just the general increase in planning fees, doesn’t lead to any more resources for that planning department if it’s not ring-fenced.

**DT: And presumably on the resources question, that’s one of the things that arose, meeting after meeting, did it? The planning departments just simply expressing that they can’t cope and need more funding?**

**JP:** Funding was not really our issue, but the way it manifested itself about the skills agenda. They are struggling to recruit and retain staff. And at the same time, more and more requirements are being put on planning departments... they were going to be at the forefront of the reform agenda that the government is seeking with digitalisation of the planning system, faster consultation, adoption of local plans, and the use of design codes, for example. All of those things have a massive impact on the officers’ time. And yet what came back time and time again was that officers’ time is used up as it is with the day-to-day work, let alone being able to then focus on this wider strategic work. And so the real challenge has been in the skill shortage. It’s also been affecting the private sector, with the private-sector colleagues around the table also saying it’s been quite difficult to recruit and retain staff. So yeah, funding is 100 per cent an issue, but the big way it comes through is in the skills challenge.

**DT: Do you feel in any way that planners and the planning system is a bit of a punchbag, politically?**

**JP:** Yes, I think it probably is. And when most politicians have talked about reforming the planning system, they don’t

know how they want to reform the planning system or what they want to do. And that’s been absolutely clear through this current government, who’ve utterly failed to deliver any meaningful planning reform. And, obviously, we have the opposition talking about reform and talking very positively actually about getting things built. The government has failed to deliver meaningful and substantial reform of the planning system. Part of the problem is that what they’ve put forward was initially going to be just too simplistic. So, the Jenrick reforms would seem to have been driven by some think-tank agenda where you could just zone the entire country into three things and that would solve everything, which does not work in a dense urban environment like London, or other cities as well. I mean, it just does not work at all. So, you’ve had quite a lot of the current government’s planning reform agenda seemingly led by how it works in greenfield environments, and certainly not in complex urban city environments. That’s been a big problem. The opposition is also talking about planning reform. We’re not yet clear what that actually means in formal terms, but they are talking as well about the green belt not being quite as rigid as it is, which is something I personally agree with, because there are parts of the green belt that are dreadful, and basically scrubland, but because it’s called the green belt it’s sacrosanct.

So being a bit more flexible... certainly parts of London and Enfield have been talking about their local plan wants to release parts in the green belt. I personally think that is very sensible. You’ve also seen decisions that this government has taken that have been highly political, certainly where it affects London. So, for example, a number of the TfL schemes that got called in, and we’ve seen the M&S decision. And there have been various other decisions like the scheme at Albert Embankment, where you just ask why? Why is it being called in in the first place? And why is it being turned down? And then the way this government has been dealing with the fire safety of second staircase regulations has had such dramatic impacts, and it seems to me it is not listening to the industry. Obviously, Gove has taken the view of very heavily attacking the industry at the moment. So yes, it is not just the planning system, but the planning system and developers are a punch bag.

**DT: Yeah.**

**JP:** You know, given we’re in a housing crisis and in desperate need of new homes, new infrastructure, new developments, it should be, you know... this is an industry that is of critical



importance to the country, and yet, you’re right, it does seem to be a bit of a punching bag.

**DT: How do you think the system can be improved? Did the group come up with any concrete proposals for that?**

**JP:** This is a really interesting debate. So, a lot of the general consensus is that you can make some smaller changes to the planning system, but if you actually fund it properly, it is fundamentally sound. And that is certainly something I agree with. It would be a mistake to make a wholesale, kind of, throw it away and almost start again, which is what the Jenrick proposals almost were, where he was supposed to have everything plan-led. Everyone’s supposed to engage on a plan-led basis, which nobody really does. And then you’re supposed to have design codes that manage everything. It was an approach that got a pretty negative response. You do want to make sure that our planning system remains flexible and responsive and does allow local decision-making as an important part of local democracy. So, a lot of the fundamentals of having a local plan and allowing local politicians to be able to judge developments against that plan and against national



policy, certainly in London, have led to very high-quality architecture and development. It's also led successfully to a lot of positive community gain, community benefit, from it. I hope the next government, whoever that might be, will take a more positive attitude towards the areas where we can be reforming the current planning system and making it work better. And fundamental to that will be the proper funding of local authority planning departments, addressing the long-term skills challenge, and embracing technology and digitisation. I hope that's the approach they take. On the planning panel, because we met three or four times a year, we didn't attempt to do what various other groups were doing, which was to try and rewrite the planning system—that was never going to be within our remit. We have identified specific areas where we've made some suggestions on some planning reform, including at the London Plan level, in particular, where we felt that it should be a slightly shorter, more strategic document—it's become a little bit too detailed and cumbersome. And then we focused as well on two areas that people felt were enormously important—social value in the planning system and community engagement—and how you properly engage local communities when developments are coming forward. So those were some of the areas that we focused on.

**DT: I was going to ask you about community engagement, because obviously your period of chairing this group extended through COVID, when there was much more digitisation. Would you say that community participation has improved because of that?**

**JP:** Yes. I mean, obviously, I'm in a fortunate position where London Communications Agency is at the forefront of community engagement. COVID forced us to embrace digital technology faster than we had been doing, and it has forced the whole country, the whole world, as we know, to embrace the same. We're having this meeting on Teams, that we weren't doing even four years ago. And it's the same now for community engagement. So, it doesn't replace face-to-face engagement. It doesn't replace actually showing people a model and putting it in a local hall and talking to people. But the tools that you now have at your disposal are much greater. It definitely allows you to reach out to a wider audience; it definitely allows you to tap into harder-to-reach groups. There are ways of reaching out to young people through social media, and engaging more people, because the problem with the traditional meeting in a church hall is that they tend to be dominated by some of the leading players in the community and other people feel a bit shy. When you are having a webinar, on the other hand, it does become considerably more democratic as to how people feel they have a voice in a meeting like that, and you're able to use different methods of feedback digitally. So yes, it has absolutely improved how developers and others are able to engage with local communities. But it also means they've got to work a bit harder to do it. They've got to be aware of what these different tools are. They've got to have the right help to enable them to do that. But yeah, no question. It's improved how you can engage.

**DT: So, projecting five years from now in this sector what might we expect to have changed do you think?**

**JP:** Right now, it's the end of 2023 and the start of 2024. The sector is in a pretty difficult position at the moment, as we know. There are massive viability challenges; build costs are high; borrowing costs are high. And although the number of planning applications is falling, there's still a decent number of planning applications. But the number of those planning applications that are now going to be turned into deliverable schemes is an interesting question, because a lot of what people are securing planning for isn't actually viable to deliver because of the economic conditions at the moment. So, the industry does need a bit of a kickstart, a leg-up from government, both to make planning policy more certain and to make government decisions more certain and supportive. Although I said earlier that I think the planning system does not need throwing away and starting again, it has become very costly and uncertain throughout the process. So, we have a fundamental supply and demand imbalance. We have an ever-growing housing crisis, we have office stock that we know needs to be bought up to modern standards of environmental performance, and we have city centres that are still adjusting to post-COVID hybrid working. So, it's not just the complete Monday to Friday in the office, and the weekend being very different, as we know. So, there's a huge amount of development and adjustment that still needs to take place. London is a magnet for international investment. It has good governance, it is in the UK, which is attractive for international investment for a whole host of reasons. So, we have every ability to harness all of that in the right way and see a real development boom take place. So, at my most optimistic, I would hope in five years' time that we have a supportive government environment for development and that the investment that we need into infrastructure—into hospitals, into schools, into housing, into retrofitting for environmental performance—can actually be delivered.

**DT: Final question. Have you enjoyed being chair? And what is your abiding memory, if you have one?**

**JP:** I've definitely enjoyed it. Yeah! It's, been really interesting seeing the people around the table. I was trying to think about what my abiding memory, if I have one, is! I suppose it's just the optimism of the people, really, I think everyone knows that you don't go into the built environment if you're not probably a born optimist, because it's pretty difficult (laughs)! And so, you know, despite all the challenges that everyone faces, everyone's still really positive, nice to each other and happy, in the main. So, I suppose the main thing was just a really, really nice atmosphere that you had around those meetings will be the one thing you take away, because everyone is going into it trying to do something as a force for good. You want to be securing good outcomes. You want to be securing good architecture, good development, good community benefits. And so, the kind of unanimity of agreement on most issues was probably the one thing that I'll probably take away.

**DT: Brilliant. Well thank you on behalf of NLA for all the work you've done.**

**JP:** Good, thank you David, that's very kind. Speak to you soon. Cheers.

**DT: Bye! ●**

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# Fleet

Nostalgia meets contemporary design







# SOUL PROVIDER

David Taylor talks to Jamestown principal chairman and president Michael Phillips about the secrets of creating great places in the US, long-term investment, and lessons for London

Jamestown is one of the foremost real estate firms in the world, adept at forging richly mixed-use urban areas, innovation hubs and community centres—places like One Times Square and Chelsea Market in New York, Industry City in Brooklyn, Ponce City Market in Atlanta and European ventures like Groot Handelsgebouw, the dynamic home to 450 companies near Rotterdam’s Central Station. So, what could London learn from its approach?

I caught up with the firm’s principal, chairman and president Michael Phillips, over in the UK capital for one of his regular monthly visits, to find out.

The firm is most known, Phillips says, for large-scale adaptive reuse projects. But all of them share one major element in common. Time.

‘It is our belief that they take multiple generations to take root and to flourish,’ he says. ‘So long-term community investment is important as an aspect of that. Not just because it’s good business, but because it’s also the right thing to do.’

For Jamestown, this means putting the tenant, occupiers and workforces at the forefront of its collective mind. ‘Because with happy, healthy tenants, a community surrounding it, and a workforce driving it, we get the outcomes that our investors are looking for.’

Phillips admires the long-term view of the lifecycle of physical buildings or communities, recognising that as they grow and evolve, there is a need to change and evolve along with them. ‘You have to continue to curate and edit and innovate and invest in it to get a long-term outcome,’ he says. ‘Which is not so different from farming, by the way; rotating crops and letting fields lay fallow occasionally to regenerate the soil.’

The approach is not typical in the US, Jamestown having fundamentally European roots (it was founded by German investor Christoph Kahl in 1983) contributing to its longer horizon and seeing investments bearing fruit two or three leasing cycles later. ‘I think being good stewards of the place means fundamentally a better outcome from a return metric

standpoint, but I think it’s also certainly more satisfying from a place standpoint.’

The company aims to build what it describes in its marketing material as ‘unique, iconic urban centres’.

Are these the most important elements? Phillips believes that the adjectives used here form essential ingredients, but volunteers that perhaps a corresponding word to iconic here might be ‘commodity’. That is, he would rather have something that is identifiable and culturally relevant, and that people feel connected to. But an icon can also mean a lot of different things, not just a flashy tower. It can mean the local coffee shop on the corner that has what Phillips terms ‘incredible respect’ in the community. Or it could be One Times Square, which ‘produces’ New Year’s Eve—in other words being the

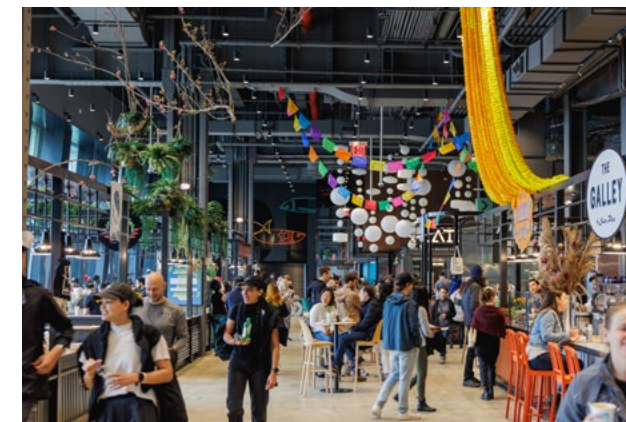
location for many of the celebrations, including the famous ball drop (watched by 300 million people). Here, as elsewhere, the ground plane was key as far as Jamestown is concerned for effective placemaking. But ‘unique’ is important too because Phillips believes we are surrounded by so many things every day that ‘numb our senses’.

‘We need things that turn our senses on,’ he says. ‘So, to me, it’s like sprinkling sea salt on the salad or a dish before you serve it. It just

heightens the flavour. And so, I think “unique” is important in that regard because that heightens the experience.’

Much of this points back to Phillips’ penchant for food as a focus for good city-making. But some of it also feels a little like some of what Thomas Heatherwick has been offering as of his *Humanise* book and campaign. ‘I’m a great fan of Thomas’s,’ replies Phillips. ‘We’ve worked with Thomas quite a lot and respect his thinking. I think we’re aligned in that.’

People crave to connect themselves to one another and places, he goes on. So, Jamestown aims to connect through creating place, the ‘spiritual Main Street’, the high street, local or, as he brands it, the ‘place that you go to celebrate your wins and lick your wounds and take your children for their birthdays, and to court the person you’re dating.’ But to do all of that it needs to elicit some response.



People places — Jamestown’s Pier 57





Foodie heaven — Chelsea Market in New York's Meatpacking District. A model for London?



The scheme — food hall, shopping mall, office building and TV production facility — has been owned by Alphabet, the parent company of Google, since 2018



Bucks, and fizz — Jamestown's vision for One Times Square in New York

Jamestown has been involved in the planning and integration for some of Google's initiatives around King's Cross in London — where Heatherwick is working with BIG — too, Phillips confirms. And King's Cross more broadly gets a lot right in many ways at the human scale, Phillips feels.

So where are the other models, and what are the ingredients that contribute to that 'perfect' urban environment? In actual fact, suggests Phillips, imperfection is the perfect environment, in a way. As human beings, we are fundamentally more comfortable with a little messiness — which again comes over time, and over multiple generations and iterations. In London, he lists some examples: places like Neal's Yard and Petersham Nurseries (a 'crazy great place' built out of abandoned greenhouses), Pavilion Road in Chelsea, and even Hackney, which he finds 'incredible' in its imperfection.

In terms of its own projects, Jamestown's Chelsea Market in the Meatpacking District is thought of as a food hall. But it is in fact a 1.1 million sq ft (c. 102,000 sqm) building with media and technology tenants on the upper floors. It's where *The Food Network* started and where YouTube's studios are now. It is where *New York One*, the local television studio, broadcasted from. 'It's a great vehicle of commerce and culture and innovation. But it also has functioned as a "must stop" place on the food tour of New York,' says Phillips, and the core of what has been a 6 million sq ft (c. 557,000 sqm) group of buildings that Jamestown developed which became an innovation hub, and — ultimately, when Alphabet bought it for \$2.4 billion in 2018 — Google's New York headquarters. What began as an outsider's office destination Downtown became a place people came to from Midtown: the Meatpacking District.





Pier 57 — a culinary, recreational and educational destination in Hudson River Park, and an ode to New York’s maritime history

Over in Boston, he points to the Innovation and Design building, a 1.3 million sq ft (c. 111,000 sqm) harbour warehouse on a working waterfront in which the company created a community network of businesses that can collaborate. ‘That whole arc of idea-to-deployment is what we spend a lot of time trying to curate into our business environments and creative environments. And I think that’s a meaningful pursuit.’

In Atlanta, there is the City Market scheme, where Jamestown has created its first mass timber building using material sourced from Jamestown’s own timber forest. The company figured out that it was cheaper to use its own from 100,000 acres (c. 40,000 ha) of FSC-certified timber than buy it from Eastern Europe. Working with timber management company Georgia-Pacific, it has invested in forests in South and North Carolina, Alabama and Georgia, with significant projects in Charleston, Raleigh and Atlanta. The move started as a timber

fund it formed as an alternative investment strategy and hedge against other markets. But it progressed over the last 10 years to finding solutions with the ESG team to build better buildings that people want to occupy. CLT thus became an important topic both from a carbon and quality-of-life standpoint.

Phillips can trace his own interest in development a long way back. When he was a very young child taking a ceramics class, while all the other kids were making vases and pots, Phillips made a walled garden, with a house in the middle of it. ‘So, I must have loved the built environment, even then, to build it in clay,’ he remembers.

He grew up in California, spent a lot of time travelling in Europe and studied in London at the American University in Marylebone. He liked the city so much he bought a home here. But he started really as a retailer, witnessing first-hand the importance of the landlord in the growth of places, and how important retail interaction is to community development.

Particularly enjoying the transactional element, Phillips began creating retail places, and then office places. ‘I did my first project at 22, and I’m now 54,’ he says. ‘I’d love to say that there was some great plan, but I’m driven by the passion to keep creating things and to work with really talented people.’

The project when he was 22 involved some creative office and craft studios in an industrial park in Atlanta. These were single-storey 1950s and 1960s buildings that allowed a lot of flexibility at a time when the Australian School of Modernist Architecture inspired Phillips to use inexpensive materials in an innovative way. ‘And then I did a shopping centre, and the rest is history. I just kept going from there.’

Today he loves to eat, so is involved in the food world, he explains. He loves to shop, too, so he’s in retail. ‘I also love to be comfortable—I’m in the office world, so I can have beautiful spaces to work in. And I love to live well and sleep well. So, I’m in the residential world.’

When Phillips was at the American University it was a ‘cool’ time to be in London, seeing the rise of Marylebone High Street and its exemplary, mostly independent, retail development, including the cookware store Divertimenti on Marylebone Lane. On a similarly foodie point, Phillips remembers too that this was 1988, when he witnessed the birth of Ruth Rogers and Rose Gray’s seminal River Café in Hammersmith.

# ‘London is the most international city of the cities that we spend time in in Europe, it has a great entrepreneurial energy’

These days he spends around four or five months a year in Europe, with offices and a house in London and an apartment in Paris. There are offices too in Lisbon, Milan, Cologne, Amsterdam, Bogotá, Boston, San Francisco, New York, Washington and Madrid, so the firm feels it has a good vantage point from which to see trends. It certainly has a good track record of spotting key moves in the market: Twelve months before the onset of the 2008 financial crisis Jamestown liquidated 75 per cent of its investments and reimbursed the proceeds to its investors. The company then made more than \$500 million of real estate investments in 2010, including acquiring a former Sears building from the city of Atlanta, which was redeveloped into Ponce City Market.

So, what of London? Where London does not have a unified planning process, feels Phillips, New York has a ‘very good process for zoning and entitlements and the process of engagement and community interaction.’ He has felt this to be a challenge, but it has led to good results in terms of creating places. There is not a lot it can teach London, however, a city he views as ‘outstanding’ in many ways. The community feels they have more of a hand in a project in New York, though, Phillips believes, through systems and a perhaps better-structured engagement process.

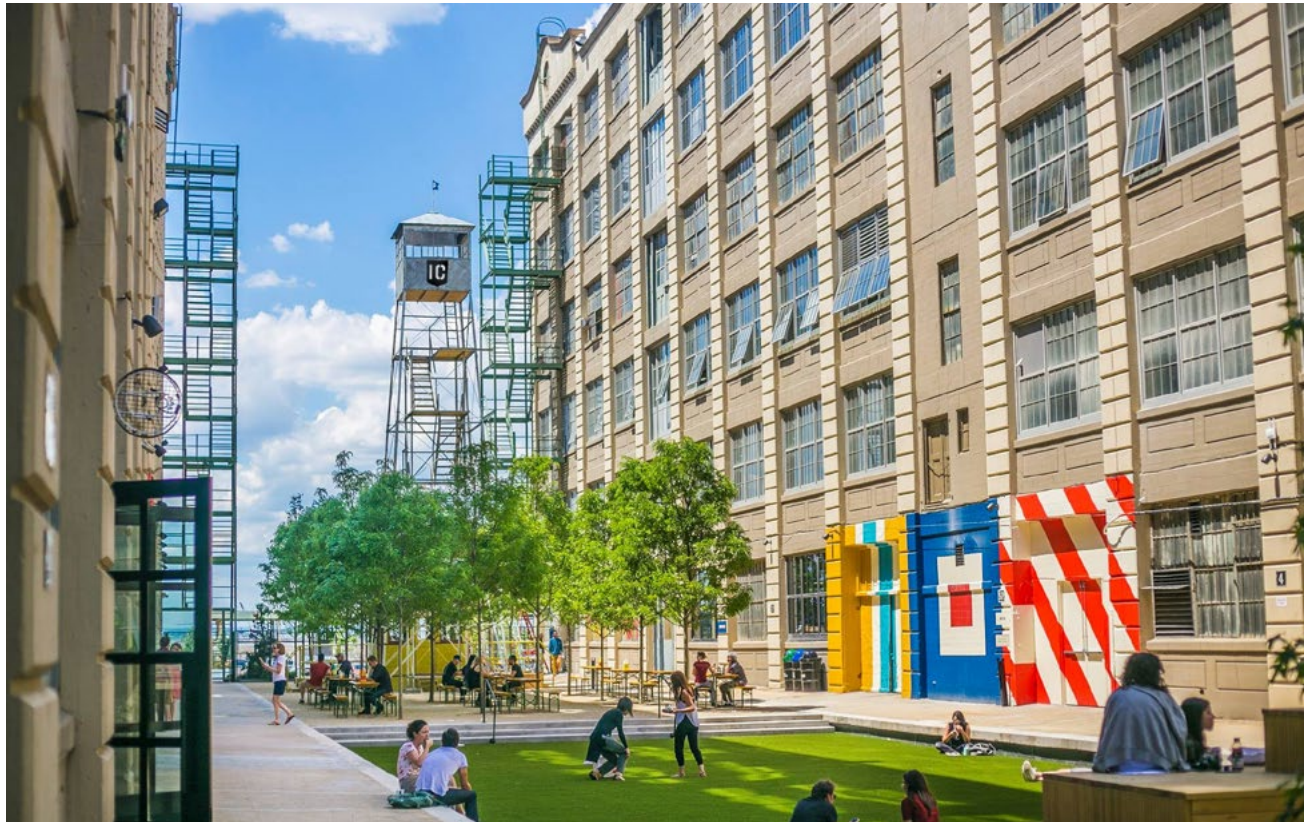
‘But we are optimists and I think one thing that is a little bit aligned with London is that the US is fundamentally a country of immigrants and a place of people having very opportunistic and entrepreneurial thoughts. And I do think there’s a great parallel to a sort of energy in London. It’s the most international city of the cities that we spend time in in Europe, and I think it also has a great entrepreneurial energy.’

In the past decade, Phillips feels that London has seen a great deal of changes in the neighbourhoods outside the core, citing Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park and some innovative temporary container housing in South London he saw. But the biggest area of advancement is in immersive and experiential retail. ‘No one’s doing it better than the British right now,’ says Phillips. There’s an energy around creativity and innovation for experience that is ‘fascinating’ and in evidence on projects from Abba Voyage to the work of Bompas & Parr.





Industry City on the banks of the East River attracts 15,000 visitors per week



One of Industry City's courtyards, offering respite for the visitors to the Brooklyn site



Groot Handelsgebouw in Rotterdam, now home to 450 companies in an 'energetic and engaged community'

Not that New York is shy and retiring on the extravaganza front. Jamestown's One Times Square, the locale for much of the city's festivities at New Year, is to become a 21st-century visitor centre for the city, which has some parallels with The London Centre, the base for NLA, whose Nick McKeogh went on a tour of Jamestown projects last summer. For 100 years, Times Square has been a convening place for people, and 'building as communication piece', says Phillips. 'What we're doing in its repositioning is really creating an integrated digital experience, both externally on the sign and projection technology, but also internally, really for the first time, using video and augmented reality and virtual reality, coupled with our innovations in the virtual space, to create a communication tool and visitor centre.' The building will reopen next year, as what they hope will become the 'first stop in New York', where people can engage with the city.

So, what of the future? Jamestown is 40 years old. What might the next 40 bring? Further expansion abroad, perhaps? It is very interested in developing significant clusters, says Phillips, certainly in this country and central Europe. It is looking at housing for the emerging middle class in Latin America, and projects in London may also be on the agenda. But Phillips' focus is very much on people, particularly Generation Alpha, he says. These are the 8-to-12-year-olds of today who are going to be in the workforce in another 10 years. It will be thinking about what the products and services they might want, surrounding himself with young people and being as innovative and agile as the company can. So, what is the picture emerging from that Generation Alpha?

'They are really the third, maybe the fourth, fully digital generation,' says Phillips, 'and so just their simple way of consuming information and data and experience is very different.' They are also to some extent formed by the COVID experience and how people connect. 'I think they're going to want, in many ways, a lot of the things that we all value, which is a very analogue experience as a reaction to a very digital experience, but at the same time expect a frictionless kind of delivery of experience digitally, which they have grown up with. I think craft and connectedness will have resonance for them in ways that may be more bracketed than for older generations, but certainly as resonant.'

## 'I think now, more than ever, people want to be comforted'

As for the rest of us, there are still other forces in play that might just have an effect on a future built environment that firms like Jamestown intend to shape. People still feel a bit fragile says Phillips. 'I think we're living in a time where there's a lot of strife and a lot of conflict and a lot of questions. And so, I think, more than ever, people want to be comforted. And I think the work environment has an opportunity to respond to that.' ●



# ATTRACTING CAPITAL TO THE CAPITAL, FOR GOOD

Opportunity London CEO *Jace Tyrrell* on why it is launching a prospectus for the capital



City view — the Square Mile from Greenwich, just one of the many places on Opportunity London's radar



London remains the most attractive city in the world to invest in because of its people, diversity and dynamism. With over £20 billion in cross-border investment annually, it tops the world's league tables.

Opportunity London is now on the global roadshow, seeking the next wave of institutional capital, and launching our prospectus for the next £100 billion of opportunities exclusively at MIPIM 2024.

This pipeline was developed with London's public sector and industry leaders, all laser-focused on six key asset classes to drive our capital forward for generations. These are our six Ls for London: low-carbon real estate;

logistics and light industrial; life sciences and knowledge economy; and living, leisure and learning. We are a city literally bursting with opportunity, and now with a new dedicated front door to match investors with a pipeline of schemes.

What excites me most about taking up the helm of Opportunity London is leading a united voice for our great capital city with our growing cohort of partners. We have created a pipeline of opportunities that will contribute towards a low-carbon, equitable and liveable city—shared ambitions for us all.

However, what is abundantly clear from the billions seeking to be deployed in London is that global capital has a choice and we mustn't take our position for granted.

Our established industries such as financial and professional services, along with growth sectors in technology and science, make London a global leader in talent and innovation, and our universities are some of the best in the world. We are already, according to a recent report from JLL, the greenest capital city in Europe and on the verge of becoming a trillion-dollar economy. However, with a forward shared vision we must not be complacent.

London's fundamentals, together with high levels of liquidity and transparency, continuously make our metropolis one of the most sought-after destinations for global capital. Our generous relative pricing, and a track record of strong price and rental growth returns, are only strengthened by today's currency advantage on sterling versus the dollar. Our priority at Opportunity London is directing this appetite to invest towards the areas of our city that need it most across low-carbon real estate, regeneration, infrastructure and energy.

Inward investment has transformed our city over the last two decades, from a new Elizabeth line to the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, King's Cross to the city cluster, Canary Wharf to Wembley Park, Battersea Power Station to Old Oak Common, and Barking Riverside. The list goes on, and so do the opportunities for further investment.

In energy, we need new green infrastructure, EV charging and a huge retrofitting agenda to bring buildings up to modern standards

of environmental performance. In real estate, there are opportunities across the mix, from housing to life sciences, logistics to film and media production. And we must continue to develop the city's transport infrastructure, digital communications and waste management.

Opportunity London will guide global capital in a unique partnership that brings civic and business leaders together to showcase where investment opportunities exist, right across London.

So, let 'team London' unite at MIPIM in 2024 to unashamedly beat our drum, fly our flag and demonstrate why London is still THE best place in the world to invest and to imagine a new, evolved and low-carbon London that is truly a prosperous city for all, and a city for good. ●

## It's never been more vital to champion London to the world



By Darren Rodwell, leader of the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham and executive member for regeneration, housing and planning at London Councils

London is the most incredible city in the world. Most people do not realise that we make more films than Hollywood and are second only to Silicon Valley for tech and innovation. We have achieved global recognition in literature, with authors from William Shakespeare to Stephen Fry, and our international banking system goes back to the time of Sir Francis Drake. Our universities are world-class. And, for me most important of all, our culture and diversity are second to none.

But boy, we also need to champion our city. There's never been a more important time to attract investment, jobs and new opportunities for the Londoners of today as well as those of the future.

We know we can do it. In recent years, we've brought in more than £100 billion of investment. But we need to do more. That's where Opportunity London comes in.

Opportunity London is a cross-party initiative under the auspices of London Councils, the Greater London Authority and the City of London. It brings together 100 leading organisations from the public and private sectors, as well as from across the political spectrum.

London needs to maintain the inbound traffic of investors and opportunities to make sure we have the best chance of responding to the economic challenges we face.

I am confident that we have a compelling story to tell but — as the Chinese proverb goes — we live in interesting times, and we cannot take our foot off the pedal. We do not have all the answers. We need to learn from what others are doing globally to make sure London remains the best city in the world.

**This article has been edited and originally appeared on [onlondon.co.uk](https://onlondon.co.uk)**





# BUILDING SOCIETY

Louise Rodgers gets under the skin of Elliott Wood as the company explores ethics, regenerative design and engineering for a new age



It is a surprisingly mild day for January when I meet five of the principals of engineering consultancy Elliott Wood. The weather comes up quite soon in the conversation. Founder and chief executive Gary Elliott spent part of the previous week, which saw some of the coldest temperatures of the year

so far, in woods just outside Salisbury, sleeping in a hut and learning and thinking about regenerative design. 'It was super cold,' he admits.

Elliott, who co-founded Elliott Wood with Paul Wood 30 years ago this year, was participating in a 'learning lab' run by Oliver Broadbent, author of the book *Regenerative Structural Engineer*. Originally aimed at structural engineers, the course now has wider appeal; Elliott's fellow learners included policy-makers and lawyers. For him, it was an adventure that started with a light-bulb moment some time ago, when he realised that just aiming for sustainability is not enough. 'The whole issue around regenerative design is quite new. It's emerging,' he explains. 'The word regenerative means that you are regenerating. You are doing more than just maintaining the status quo, or doing things that are less bad. Regenerative design looks not just at the project you are working on, but much more broadly. It asks questions such as, what is the impact of all the things that go onto that site, or into that building? What's the impact of that on carbon, yes, but also what's the impact on biodiversity? It is actually trying to get a more holistic picture of the damage that we do and how we measure that. The learning lab is a great place to try and do better things, and then try to influence others, including governments, to do better things.'

Being better, and being part of a bigger, collaborative effort to be better, is a core driver for Elliott Wood. The firm adopted 'engineering a better society' as its mantra under the stewardship of director Lisa Drake, who joined the company 12 years ago with a background in organisational strategy, HR,

communications and operations. Drake's focus has been on making sure that this is much more than a branding exercise. 'The challenge was how to shift the business from being similar to all the other engineering practices in the industry,' she says. 'How do you make it more purpose-driven, so that it actually has a real impact not just on the industry, but on our clients and society as a whole? It's not just a branding exercise, it's about actually living and breathing the purpose. It's about cultural change all the way through and making sure that we walk the talk.'

Elliott Wood has recently received B Corp certification. Drake admits this was an 'arduous process' but adds: 'It has validated what we were already doing, such as transparency around finances. As opposed to giving us a new framework, it is the framework for how we are developing the business.'

'I think we have taken the business to a point where we are really driven from a cultural and a purpose perspective,' adds Elliott. 'Purpose is a slightly overused word now, but we were deliberately trying to create a really defined reason for our existence. "Engineering for a better society" came out of a long process of trying to understand what we

are about, and what is important to us. It's fair to say that the world has moved towards us as well, in the sense that we were talking about a lot of things 10 years ago that are now fully out there. It's been amazing that the business has been in the position to push boundaries in many areas. That's enabled us to grow in stature and confidence and be at the forefront of things that are emerging. We have big ambitions, and we want to influence not our own teams but others out there in the marketplace to try to do better things as well.'

We are meeting on the ground floor of Elliott Wood's Whitfield Street headquarters in the heart of Fitzrovia. Alongside Elliott and Drake, we are joined by fellow directors George Georgiou, Mark Goodbrand and Andy Downey. Georgiou, who has been with Elliott Wood for 23 years,



Street presence — Elliott Wood's Building Society home



Left to right: Gary Elliott, Lisa Drake, Mark Goodbrand, Andy Downey and George Georgiou



oversees new business as well as getting involved with projects including, currently, 20 Giltspur Street, where the consultancy is pioneering a technique to replace two of the existing storeys with three cross-laminated timber floors, creating new floor space without bringing extra steel into the building. ‘It’s a very good example of steel reuse, but in an unconventional way, where we are moving floors using a jacking system. The whole floor will be moved in one. I’ve been told I have to stand on the floor while that happens.’ Goodbrand chips in: ‘The original plan was to demolish those floors. Throw all that steel and concrete away. Right up until George had the clever idea of just moving a floor.’

Goodbrand started his career at Urban Splash where he worked extensively with existing buildings including listed, heritage buildings, mills and warehouses. He joined Elliott Wood seven years ago. As head of service delivery, his role includes making sure that all teams are working in the same way and that all the ideas generated, from the point of view of their ETHICS strategy and ‘engineering a better society’, are filtered down. He is currently working on a hotel restoration project he can’t really talk about, because of an NDA, except to say that it will breathe life into an iconic out-of-date building so that it can deliver excellent hospitality services once again. The consultancy has form in this area, having previously worked on The Ned and The Old War Office (The OWO), both also in London.

Rebuilding Blackpool

A project he can talk about is the Blackpool Conference and Exhibition Centre, where Elliott Wood helped to return vitality to a whole town that was really struggling. ‘It’s a really important project for us in terms of how engineering can make a contribution to creating a better society,’ he explains. ‘The venue lost popularity, and the party conferences, when the air-conditioning failed just as Tony Blair was giving an important interview about the Iraq War. All the conferences moved to Manchester but now they are back in Blackpool because we helped to build an amazing facility that is nestled in among all the winter gardens and includes the biggest opera house outside London, as well as new conference and exhibition facilities.’

Downey joined Elliott Wood in 1996, so was there ‘not quite at the conception but certainly at the birth’. His board responsibilities include thought leadership, creativity, and a lot of the consultancy’s messaging around engineering and its role in society. The project Downey cites as an exemplar of this is Alfriston Swimming Pool, completed in 2014. Designed by Duggan Morris Architects, its form is created from a series of repeating triangular panels raised above the ground to allow views out and glimpses in. The roof is constructed almost wholly from timber and sits on steel piloti above a reinforced concrete sub-structure. ‘A lot of the vocabulary around what we are trying to do came out of that project,’ he says. ‘For me, it is a fusion of beauty meets technology; science meets art. It’s in the intersection between science and art that the good things happen. It was difficult, but interesting. A lot of people thought we had just made it complicated when all we really needed to do was put a roof on it, but we made it simple and beautiful, using timber rather than steel. And, because it’s simple, it is better. The thinking behind that project stayed

with me. It got locked in my head as the way we should be doing things, but because we care about making nice things, we needed to scale that ambition.’

An even earlier project that influenced this direction was the execution of artist Anthony Gormley’s *Quantum Cloud*, the contemporary sculpture located next to London’s O2, which was completed in 1999. ‘Gormley came to us with this idea, and we had nine months to turn it from a concept to a design, then procure it, and build it,’ recalls Elliott. ‘It involved technology that hadn’t been used before. It was extremely challenging. Extraordinary. And we were only six years old then.’

Outside the meeting room, the ground floor of the office is buzzing with activity. It is a co-working space known as The Building Society, created by Elliott Wood, which doubles up as a networking community for individuals and organisations in the built environment. It was deliberately named to reference the original building society movement of the mid-nineteenth century, where cooperative associations of working men came together to pool resources so that they could build their own homes.

Downey picks up the theme of purpose and explains how The Building Society, and its 400-plus members, fit in. ‘What we have actually created is a business eco-system,’ he says. ‘As more people are attracted to the energy around what we are trying to project in general, a better society, we are getting more interesting firms wanting to be associated with us. We are happy for them to be here and have their own identity, but then, as part of this eco-system, everyone contributes and supports each other. With The Building Society we have become a business community of the 140 people who work directly for us, plus 400. This amplifies our voice so that we can project louder and further. And that, of course, attracts more people.’

The only way is ETHICS

I am curious about what exactly it is that Elliott Wood is so keen to get people and companies talking about. Downey refers me to the consultancy’s manifesto document ETHICS, published five years ago to mark its quarter century. ETHICS outlines issues society in general faces across education, technology, healthcare, infrastructure, culture and sustainability and suggests what the built environment’s role is in facing these challenges. When we meet, and to mark its 30th anniversary, the consultancy is in the process of updating the original ETHICS. Downey explains the relevance of this. ‘It has been very much a journey, from when we produced ETHICS to where we are now. ETHICS was a way of helping us to think slightly differently about purpose and culture. But it was never meant to be a checklist, or a guide, or a spreadsheet — a kind of “if you do that, then eventually you will get there” set of instructions. It was more a way of asking how we can change our modus operandi and think differently, and do better, and influence people around us to challenge the big issues that are impacting society and the built environment.’

‘It is fair to say that we probably went a bit too big with the original ETHICS, so now we are going to be more precise,’ he continues. ‘We are going to narrow things down a bit and set some serious outcomes for the next five years or so.’ I push him to be more specific. Downey doesn’t want to give too



Whitehall wonder — the OWO Raffles hotel scheme, created with EPR Architects



The Quantum Cloud at the O2, designed by Antony Gormley



Tower Hamlets Town Hall, designed with AHMM





Playtime — Alfriston School, designed with Duggan Morris



Water works — Elliott Wood provided civil and structural design for the swimming pool at the school

much away in advance of the manifesto’s launch later this year but what he does say is that it will tackle ‘sustainability washing’. ‘We’ve all been using the word for the last 30 years, but no one really knows what it means,’ he says. ‘There are things within sustainability, such as regenerative design and thinking about the wider impact we have on the planet, that we need to turn our attention to.’

The consultancy ran a couple of ‘engrossment sessions’ with the full staff team to generate ideas for the updated ETHICS. As Downey explains: ‘You can’t see the future through old eyes, and to a certain extent we were part of creating the problem. We need to involve other generations in the process of working towards defining, and solving, them.’

The Building Society will be part of the testbed for developing solutions. ‘We have this space downstairs, the Academy, where all the different consultants can present their work,’ explains Broadbent. ‘They share their latest projects or have debates about innovations in their field. We also use that space on a Friday for our technical teams to come together to share challenges they have encountered during the week, and problem-solve together.’

‘That’s where another layer of the transparency model really comes into play,’ adds Drake. ‘It’s not just about business situations, but about sharing a culture of empowerment, where people can make a real contribution.’

Our conversation inevitably moves to what’s next for Elliott Wood. The updated ETHICS manifesto is clearly a part of that, as is regenerative design. ‘I think one of our ambitions is to take the adaptive reuse work we have expertise in and start to explore that overseas,’ says Broadbent. ‘We have worked in other markets, but we haven’t been that proactive about it yet.’ Elliott Wood is an active partner of the Londonon

collective, which has resulted in international commissions, including Bergen Waterfront, winner of the *Architectural Review*’s Future Project Award in 2022. ‘Repurposing some of the existing assets along the waterfront as part of the masterplan was a relatively new idea there,’ explains Broadbent. ‘We would definitely like to be doing more of that kind of work.’

And then of course there is the impact of AI. ‘We recognised some time ago that the global world of digital is fundamental to everything that we are going to be doing and is changing very rapidly,’ says Elliott. ‘One of the things we need to think about is what impact that will have on us as a company, as an industry. We have somebody within our business to focus 100 per cent on digital, both on how we can improve our processes with the things we do now and how we engage with AI tools to generate ideas for the future.’

Downey adds: ‘If you go back to the 1970s and early 80s, Steve Jobs was working with the digital capability that then existed and he designed a product range that took all that science and tech and data and put in the most artistic front end. He owned the creative space. For me that is what engineering is about—if we can harness digital and data then we can do anything. We can really move the needle on some of these big challenges.’

Elliott then segues into an anecdote about his time in the woods and brings us all back down to earth. ‘We were asked to sit around the campfire and share a poem that was important to us. I decided to write my own and, believe me, I am no poet. So, I went to ChatGPT and wrote in “regenerative design poem”. And, I kid you not, it came up with the most amazing poem!’ ●

Grant Smith; Elliott Wood; Constantine Rybkin; Timothy Soar; Jack Hobhouse





# GREEN SHOOTS

Claire Bennie has been involved in housing for most of her career. *David Taylor* meets a woman who believes the ‘tree’ needs to be retired and replaced by new planting if the capital is to flourish

London housing is like a tree which has been left, unpollarded and withering, so that its roots are long and the structures that guide it are deeply engrained, seemingly without hope of new life.

So says Claire Bennie, whose use of this analogy is even more appropriate given that her Camberwell community took citizen action when a beloved tree at the centre of her Art Deco housing block was given the thumbs down by a tree surgeon who felt its time had come. Their solution? To quickly plant a couple of new young trees alongside to keep it all together, also bringing new hope and better scope for taking more care next time. Perhaps, likewise, there is hope for the wider housing system in London and beyond, too.

The tree may be a pat comparison, but Bennie—who has been in housing for decades after beginning as an architect at Proctor & Matthews and has written two extensive state-of-the-market reports for NLA—believes that new ways of looking at things, and crucially new money in straitened times, are crucial.

‘The only answer is actually to build more affordable housing, at a really basic level,’ she says, with the caveat that all of this is sewn up in healthy national economics, gap funding and that complicated, dying tree.

Bennie always loved science and arts as a child and was told by her teachers to combine the two, ‘for God’s sake’, at university. So, she did architecture and quickly realised it was fascinating. ‘I really enjoyed it because you suddenly think: “Oh my God, this is social, as well as physics, as well as art, you know, as well as sculpture?”’ So, it was right up my street, but you don’t know that when you’re younger.’

Her first degree at Bath University was in the teeth of the recession of the early 1990s, and around half of Bennie’s fellow graduates didn’t have a job to go to. So, Bennie went on to Glasgow School of Art and got a job with Proctor & Matthews, where housing was the bread and butter. She became an associate there, ‘drawing two or three buildings for years’ and getting stuck into the detail of development, working mostly with private-sector developers. One of the schemes she worked on was the Greenwich Millennium Village, which, looking back now, was ‘wonderfully mid-density’ even though it was held up as high density at the time. Crucially, she worked on innovation in the scheme with English Partnerships, so the whole project had a major sense of ambition and provided a good grounding in having to also think about things like transport and biodiversity. ‘It was such an unbelievably useful grounding from Steve and Andrew, Mr Proctor and

Mr Matthews, but then I found myself at the end of that whole period thinking, well, what are my options?’ The answer was that she had become fascinated by her clients and what drove them, even when they made stupid decisions. So, perhaps naively she says, she decided she’d quite like to become a client. She applied for a job at Peabody, starting in research, and then helping to write reports to help it figure out what to do, what residents think, and so on.

This was 2004, when the Decent Home Standard came into force, and meant that Peabody had to stop newbuilds and focus on existing stock. ‘I learned an enormous amount over two or three years in Peabody’s asset management team, understanding what happens to 20,000 homes when you hand them over for 150 years.’

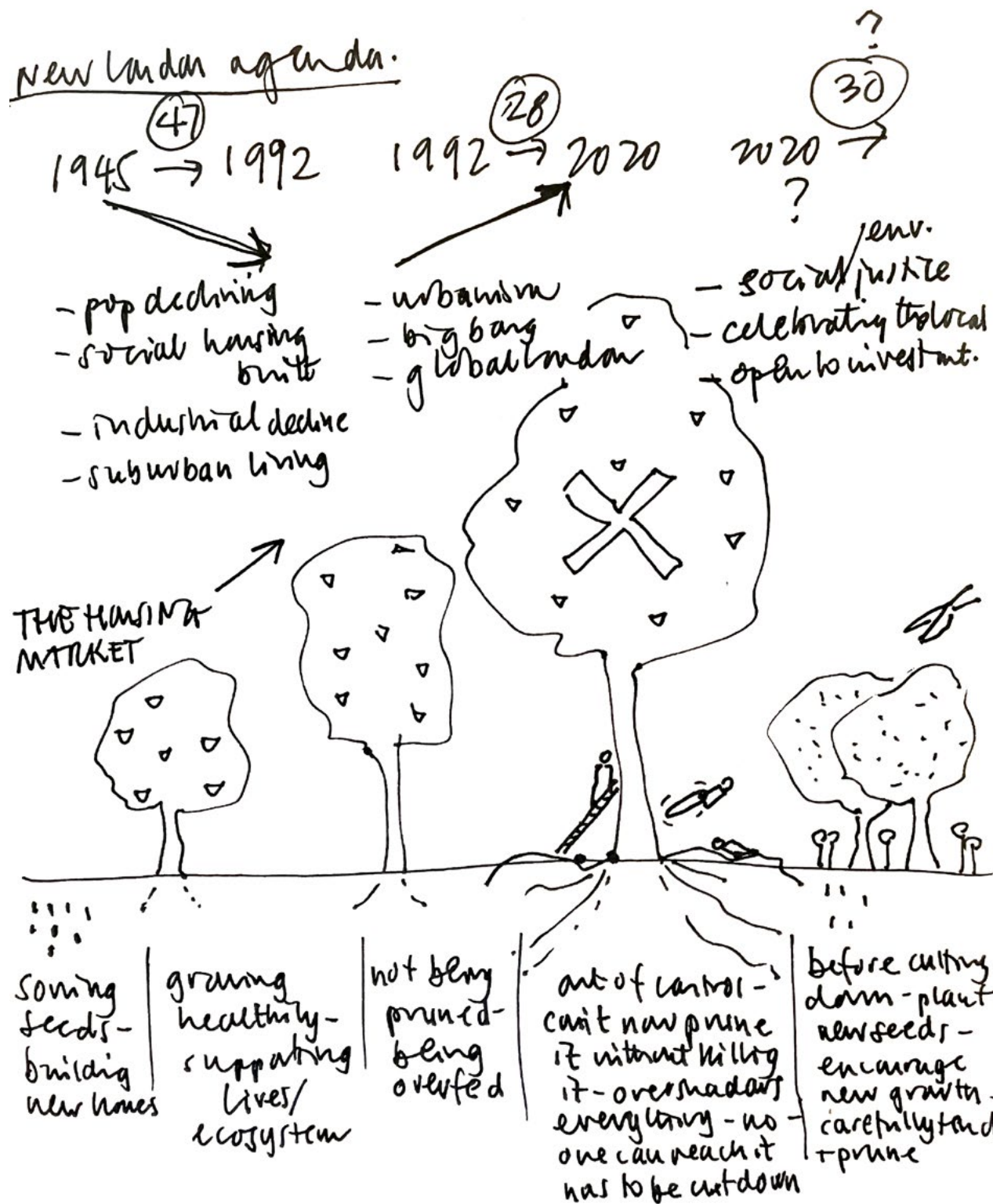
She stayed on to build up Peabody’s development team from scratch between 2008 and 2014, going through two cycles of development and learning yet more in the process. From a small practice panel came larger projects and a big commercial push. But Bennie found herself looking at spreadsheets too much. ‘It kind of overtook me in terms of what I bring to development and design.’

She took a year off to travel Europe on a train and write a blog before returning to take a large project in Swindon with Nationwide to planning. Since then, for the past seven years, Bennie has been trying to help public-sector clients ‘navigate through all the barriers and pitfalls that can happen when you’re trying to deliver on public land’. This could be procurement rules, writing briefs or even the culture within organisations not supporting quality, or the skills of your team.

Where are we now in the capital on housing? Around 70 per cent, if not more, of homes are delivered by the private sector, mostly by around 16 PLCs. ‘And they really have got it sewn up,’ she laughs. Friends of Bennie’s had approached the private sector to offer help in producing a better product but had received very short shrift. A large chunk of housing is still done by local authorities and the housing associations sector, however, so Bennie knew her skills would be better offered to the latter.

How would she characterise London’s position? ‘I think there are just loads and loads of long-term strategic decisions that have not been made in London,’ she says. ‘It’s a bit like leaving a tree to grow and never pollarding, never chopping back. And that tree goes completely out of control. And it overshadows everything. It’s sort of ugly, and it’s actually structurally unstable. I think economics, especially the housing market economy, are exactly the same. Once you’ve let it grow





## The housing tree

Bennie’s ‘napkin doodle’ of the housing ‘tree’ and how it relates to Greg Clark’s ‘30 years’ concept in the New London Agenda. ‘The critical thing in my view is to start growing lots of new intermediate housing right now, and to keep pruning and tending that new growth to make sure it doesn’t get out of control (aka sold off, planning constraints taken away etc). That big old tree (representing a broken, protected, over-inflated housing market which many cannot reach, and which is only lived in by elderly birds) can then be “retired” gradually.’

too far, there’s actually nothing you can do. You can’t do the pollarding in retrospect.’

Of course, you can’t just get rid of the tree, or the housing market. But, Bennie reasons, council tax and property taxes in general have never been ramped up to the same degree that property values have, and land values have just gone ‘insane’. There is little recognition that people’s homes earn more than they do now, and housing benefits have ramped up and up. ‘It’s as if every single Londoner, including babies, gave £1,000 to their local authority and said: “Hey, spend that.” That is what is being spent on housing benefits at the moment.’ In no way is Bennie castigating ‘scroungers’ here, more pointing out that the properties are completely devalued, and you can’t suddenly do the pollarding. ‘We’ve just let the tree grow; it’s in a totally unhealthy way.’

Affordability, quality of life, sustainability and the fact that new developments do not provide enough benefit to their local areas are key problems. Most people would say affordability is the *most* important, but the remedies are so hard because they are ‘baked in’ from the 1970s.

Isn’t the answer to build more ‘trees’? In a way yes. It’s to build more affordable housing, but this doesn’t check out financially. It always needs gap funding of some kind, and around £8.4 billion a year of that is spent via housing benefits in London. The model where housebuilders do private housing and use some of the ‘super-profits’ from that to build affordable is there, but when the private market falls away, as it is currently, the affordable of course goes with it.

It isn’t as simple as just money, either. If a new government came in and offered more investment, land supply is still also key. Public land is still not very well documented, and its release varies. And then there are the constraints of planning, including green belt and conservation areas. Some politicians are talking about compulsory purchase of land at existing use value. ‘That will be quite radical. It would almost be like going back to the war when the government purchased land to grow food and so forth. But, you know, if that’s what it takes to get the land to do it, then okay.’

The clamour to build outside London with new towns or to densify stations is also valid, but Bennie believes that all the talk about a switch to remote working is perhaps overplayed. At least 60 per cent of people don’t remote work, she counters. They work in a factory or a hospital, a shop, or a school. ‘So, you do still need affordable housing in Greater London, within shooting distance of someone’s often low-paid job.’

What would mayor Bennie do? Or, perhaps more appropriately given Khan’s lack of powers, what would housing minister Bennie do? It starts with the money and then the resolution to build affordable housing, with social rent but also mid-market. Gap funding is needed for that. Bennie would also encourage private money to match that, enticed by a moderate long-term return. There would also be plans to raise public awareness about the benefits of investing in affordable housing, fundraising through policies like property tax reform, enabling land and getting industry ready through more upskilling in matters like green building and retrofit.

Would she change planning? Probably, she says. But there are too many sacred cows in terms of what is protected, she thinks. ‘I’m not entirely convinced about having the green belt. I think you’d have to retain some kind of semblance of control,

but you could start something around carbon-positive homes only in the green belt. And then only certain bits of it can be released, which are currently doing absolutely nothing.’

We are perhaps too wedded to the housing ownership model in this country, but that may well peter out of its own accord because young people can no longer afford it. People are ‘obsessed’ with ownership because of the investment vehicle, she says. ‘But one house is only worth one house.’ It also represents security, though, which can be dealt with through ‘citizen-friendly renting regulation’ along the lines of security of tenure as done in mainland Europe.

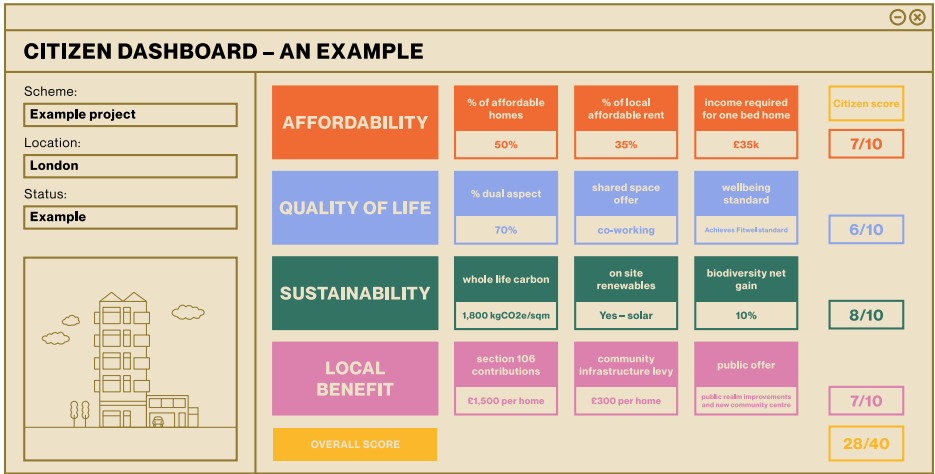
The desire to own may therefore wane, but the supposed part-saviour, build-to-rent, is ‘about to go off a cliff,’ says Bennie, because that sector is not investing in London anymore, mostly because of planning and viability. We should not beat ourselves up about yearning for home ownership, but there is a considerable demographic ‘sitting pretty’ over their residential status—the over-70s, whose whole culture and view of priorities may give way to a ‘seismic shift’ of economic attitudes of the economic realities of home ownership. ‘It’s likely that people will be voted in who are trying to solve younger people’s problems. I mean, those people will be middle-aged by that point, but the more I think about sort of life in general, the more there’s something that’s going to shift, just probably not quick enough to help people right now.’

## ‘It’s always been a bit of a mystery to me that we don’t think of affordable housing as life infrastructure’

Is she more optimistic, given the potential changes of power politically, both nationally and in London? ‘In a way, yes. But the absolute beast that is the global and local economy over the next five years means that there just isn’t a lot of public money to spend.’ We will go through a really difficult period, she says, with a ‘huge cry’ for a solution from urban areas. It is complex, but part of a solution might start in trying to fix the £28 billion paid so far in housing benefit. ‘I reckon if you told Londoners that they’re all contributing £1,000 pounds every year to, you know, prop up a landlord who’s got a crappy PRS property in London, they’d go absolutely nuts. But nobody talks about this. So, the subsidy seems invisible.’ When you look at how much is spent on generating new affordable housing from the government it is almost invisible compared to education and health. ‘It’s always been a bit of a mystery to me that we don’t think of it as life infrastructure in the same way.’

When Bennie was on her European tour, it was mostly an architectural trip. But she did get to see places like Stockholm where they were investing billions of Euros on their own land, parcelling it up and being firm about price, with developers competing only on quality. In Germany too, she saw a similar picture. But London has such ‘insane’ land values, and we





Bennie’s Citizen Dashboard idea for all developments from the NLA ‘Housing Londoners’ report

are so market-focused that we find it hard to tear ourselves away from that as framing the whole way housing is produced. ‘What’s good in Europe? They just have an overall generally far more sophisticated attitude to the balance between economics and long-term quality of life.’

Bennie’s own residential journey is interesting. She started out in life in Farnham in Surrey: ‘The gin and tonic belt, as my mother calls it’. But sadly, her father died when she was very young and life changed quickly—she moved to Twickenham when she was nine, before university called sometime later. While at Bath University she lived in a concrete student slab block overlooking the main campus drag, and would later live in Byker Wall in Newcastle. Both were highly influential on her and her desire to live somewhere connected to communal spaces and other people. But then it was time to return to the capital. ‘My aim in life was to live in zone one. I was just one of those people who was urban. I just wanted to be as close to the action as I could.’

So, it was flat-sharing, post-uni, in Islington and all sorts of other places which you can’t buy in, she laughs, such as Archway. When she was 29, she could afford her first flat (with help from a great auntie on the deposit), in Elephant and Castle, for just shy of £70,000, which was then the only zone one location in her budget. Bennie remembers she was on a salary of £18,000 as a just-qualified architect at the time and calculates that whereas the salary level of an equivalent job today would perhaps have doubled, the rise in the price of that property has soared to over £400,000. Even for a ‘crappy old flat overlooking the Walworth Road’.

Today, home is Camberwell in a 1930s development of Art Deco flats, a typology which has become an obsession. Importantly, it also had a community, with a resident board and meetings where they decide how to spend ‘a lot of money’ every year, together. ‘I hadn’t realised how much I needed a domestic community until I moved into one.’

Bennie produced the *Housing Londoners* report for NLA eight years on from an earlier tome, taking in many things that have happened including Grenfell, sustainability’s rise, the pandemic and working from home. Where before it was about supply, this time had to be different because the

sector is so ‘dysfunctional’ in London, not least because of the cost-of-living crisis. ‘All of those things just made me wonder what London housing would look like from a citizen lens rather than a built environment supply lens.’ Thus, it looks at four themes—affordability, quality of life, sustainability and local benefit. Built environment people would love to solve the affordability question, she says, but really that is a government policy issue. Other questions revolve around light, planning, density, space standards and the monumental task of

sorting out the 3 million or so homes from the 3.7 million London total in a sustainability sense.

Another interesting idea in the report is the ‘citizens dashboard’, where people might be able to see at a glance, from a series of metrics, items every development must publicly declare. Things like how much section 106 has gone in and what it is spent on, how many homes are affordable, and so on. The answers are complicated, and it is not clear who does the scoring, but Bennie hopes that it will offer more for the citizens and bring them more power. She believes, too, that since a tough moral issue is at stake requiring constitutional change, we need a citizen assembly to solve housing’s gross inequity problem or consider trade-offs.

Bennie herself doesn’t get too downhearted at the magnitude of the problems facing housing in London. But she says that work to solve the housing problems we now face needed to start perhaps 50 years ago. Pollarding that tree? She laughs. ‘But we just can’t stand market intervention, or we certainly couldn’t at the time. And so now we’ve created a sort of complete monster, which is very hard to unravel.’ The future, then, must be about a new resolve. We need to start finding new trees, start creating the next gen, and this one will gradually die and become obsolete, she offers. ‘It’s exactly what happened in the garden, here,’ she says, looking out onto her Camberwell community. ‘I suppose it’s a bit like old industry as well, isn’t it? You know, you think of this Tata Steel issue, and you think of the mines in the 1980s. You know that it’s got to come to an end, but you have to find a way of transitioning to that place carefully—that doesn’t ruin the lives of the people that depended on that thing.’ ●

**Bennie on the New London Agenda**

‘I’m really looking forward to seeing NLA members genuinely showing how they are meeting the pillars and values through their output, and seeing NLA holding them to account! It would be good to have some metrics which NLA could display any time there is an exhibition or a call-out for schemes, so that schemes can be compared openly — a bit like the citizen dashboard. I realise, having said that, how challenging that can be. But it’s needed, otherwise it’s just another set of nice words.’

Julia Hawkins



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# TACKLING HOMELESSNESS

Head of strategic partnerships at NLA *Emily Gabb* takes a look at the increasingly problematic issues of homelessness and temporary accommodation facing the capital — and some potential ways forward



With the knock-on effects of COVID and the ever-increasing cost of living placing London into a ‘poverty pandemic’, homelessness figures are up 14.5 per cent across London in the past 12 months, which equates to a staggering 1 in 50 Londoners, including 1 child in every 23 (source: London Councils, 2024).

In January, NLA invited a small cross-sector group from our membership, including borough representatives, to present their challenges around temporary accommodation to foster a dialogue that spans borough boundaries and helps to share what has, is and isn’t working.

With a system deemed to be ‘broken at every level’, councils are seeing the numbers of residents declaring homelessness continue to rise, placing further constraints on already stretched staff resources and budgets. The bill for London boroughs currently sits at around £90 million per month, and one council outside London has been quoted as spending 49p out of every £1 of council tax on temporary accommodation (source: Lewes and Eastbourne Councils, 2024).

One of the key issues facing councils is the inability to procure and retain suitable temporary accommodation. With PRS listings down 41 per cent on the quarterly average, according to reports by Savills and LSE, as more property owners move away from providing temporary accommodation, either by selling their properties or being able to charge market rent, the strain on the traditional model of procuring from these providers becomes more acute.

With presentations rising, it’s harder for time-poor councils to be creative with their solutions to tackle this challenge as they must be reactive to the immediate need. Other issues flagged included:

- An overly complex planning system which doesn’t favour a modular typology
- Viability
- Risk-aversion
- Previous bad experiences of PDR create reluctance to explore retail and commercial options
- Pushback from community
- No legislation only guidance, which allows both planning and government to make this more challenging

While it was agreed that there is no silver bullet, there must be something more we can do, both as councils and as the built environment community.

One solution that was proposed was to look at land that could be unlocked temporarily across long-term

regeneration projects, recognising the opportunities to use some of those parcels and making it part of the wider development cycle. This was caveated with the need to ensure that certain standards were met in creating a neighbourhood with access to amenities, rather than a building site. Leveraging meanwhile spaces has proven hugely successful in Lewisham at the RSHP-designed scheme, Place Ladywell.

Using vacant retail and office spaces for temporary accommodation was raised by several attendees. Projects like Hackney Doorways illustrate how volunteering and collaboration between key stakeholders, consultants and local authorities can deliver a high-quality, low-cost solution. While this might not work for all retail or commercial spaces, work could be undertaken by councils to identify those that could be suitable. Other ideas included:

- Councils having the ability to create their own temporary accommodation
- Modular units that can be moved to areas of most need
- Leveraging right-to-buy and maximising investment in the acquisition of property
- Using affordable homes, GLA and rough sleeping grants.

From this meeting, there were three key points that NLA will be taking away as steps to move forward:

- It’s important to remember that there will always be a need for emergency accommodation and clearly distinguish this from temporary solutions. Emergency accommodation needs to be permanent and have standards—it’s for people who are the most vulnerable and need to be helped back into permanent accommodation.
- We need policies and frameworks for temporary and emergency standards that are appropriate to each need. Currently, although there are policies and standards for other types of housing there’s nothing around this in the London Plan, which affects individual borough’s local plans, which results in uncertainty, inevitably costing time and money.
- Project 123 is being delivered by G15 and London Councils, inviting boroughs and housing associations to be transparent about a model that could work and share good practice for a more collective approach. As an industry we are quick to celebrate success but often hide what hasn’t worked, resulting in the same mistakes being repeated. It’s time to embrace the concept of ‘black box thinking’—something that will form the basis of our London Leaders network series, looking at how we can embrace what hasn’t worked and take the lessons forward. ●



PLACE/Ladywell — RSHP’s colourful, volumetric, temporary answer to homelessness in Lewisham



# GETTING THINGS MOVING

David Taylor caught up with New Londoner of the Year, Lord Hendy of Richmond Hill, to talk transport connectivity, placemaking, HS2, and owning and driving two Routemaster buses

**David Taylor:** You have just won New Londoner of the Year. What does that mean to you?

**Peter Hendy (Lord Hendy of Richmond Hill):** Oh, I'm really very proud, actually. I think that it's very nice that the judges have recognised the contribution that transport plays in the life and development of the city, and it's a great honour to have been involved in it at such a high level for quite a long time. So yeah, it's a lovely prize.

**DT:** And you mentioned that connecting places is key. Can you enlarge on that in the current state of affairs? I'm thinking particularly of things like HS2...

**PH:** Well look, let's take a practical example. If you look at Crossrail, or the Elizabeth Line, which has had some controversy, certainly latterly, when it didn't open when it should, and it's cost more than anybody expected it to... But look at the effect on the city. Look at the dramatic changes which have already started to happen as a consequence of it coming—the places outside the Greater London boundary that you connect. Places like Slough—which is a dismal, low-value and, you know, sort of industrial warehousing—look at the buildings, look at the developments which are now being put there.

And then look at the effect in the city itself—round the Crossrail stations at Farringdon, at Whitechapel—and you can see the effect that transport has. If you go further back, actually, the Jubilee Line had a very narrow business case. When it was opened to Stratford, it too was late and cost a lot more money. Look at the development that's taken place as a consequence. Would that have happened without those transport links? The answer's no. So, actually, transport and development are intimately connected.

**DT:** Does the government have too short-term a view about transport projects to fund them effectively? To back them effectively? And if it does, what is a way of us getting around that?

**PH:** You can't help but remark on the prime minister's recent decision to curtail HS2, which has been the subject

of cross-party agreement ever since it was devised, a good 15 years ago. And I think that that is a shame. Because the infrastructure takes a long time to build, costs a lot of money, and generally will last between 100 and 120 years. In fact, most of it lasts longer than that, if you look at the age of the national railway network, we have structures in the Stockton and Darlington railway built 197 years ago. So, it's past its payback date. And in the modern world, you can only get those done in government terms of a maximum of five years by a cross-party agreement about what the right thing to do is. So, I think it is a shame that the prime minister has made that decision about HS2. Of course, our job as Network Rail and the national railway network is to work out what the consequences of it are. But what I would say is that actually the reason for a body like the National Infrastructure

Commission, the reason why politicians have a great deal of power is that some of the decisions they're taking have huge ramifications over a long period of time. So, actually, they do need to think quite carefully about the consequences of either starting infrastructure programmes or stopping them.

**DT:** If you were to look into your crystal ball over the next five years in the London picture,

what do you expect to happen in the transport world?

**PH:** Without taking political sides, because I can't and I don't, I mean, what's the likelihood? The likelihood is, following the 2024 elections we will probably still wind up with a Labour mayor, and we will probably have a Labour government. What I hope as a consequence is that that will make the relationship between the mayor and the government easier. And we'll restore to TfL the sort of long-term funding profile which will enable it to get on with the infrastructure developments needed to develop London further in line with the London Plan. That's not a political point. It's a practical point, which is that TfL, as a transport authority like we do at Network Rail, needs a long-term programme. And, actually, the city needs a long-term programme because it has started to grow again. It's clearly got all sorts of difficulties with housing. It's got



New Londoner of the Year — Peter, Lord Hendy of Richmond Hill



In his element — Lord Hendy of Richmond Hill addressing the New London Awards crowd at Guildhall

employment difficulties and connectivity is a way of alleviating those. And if you don't invest in connectivity, you make it more difficult.

**DT:** Two more things. Firstly, you're now a lord. Tell me what that experience has been like so far, including your first speech.

**PH:** So, it's very daunting. And in fact, the late Lord Judge who sadly just died recently, who's the convener of the crossbench peers, rang me and said, after it was announced, if you don't have some trepidation about this, you're probably not a decent, not a good appointment. And I did have a lot of trepidation about it. And actually, it's a great honour to be there. It's not very compatible with the sort of job that I do at Network Rail...

**DT:** Timewise?

**PH:** Timewise—I work four days a week. But the opportunity of contributing your experience to governance and the formation of law, and advising the government is a really good one. So, I've been introduced, which is the sort of formal bit where you wear robes...

**DT:** Where do you get the robes from?

**PH:** You borrow them (laughs). I don't need a set of peers' robes in my wardrobe! I tell you, they're very warm and the House of Lords is very cold in the winter! But anyway, I've

done my maiden speech, which you can read—it's 15 March 2023 in *Hansard*. In fact, you can watch it on Parliament TV. Look for Lord Hendy of Richmond Hill, because my brother is in there and he's just Lord Hendy. So, I've done my maiden speech, but I can't get in there very often because I've got a diary full of appointments about Network Rail and about the LLDC. But I will go in for subjects that I think I know something about, and I think I know a bit about transport, I know a bit about London and a bit about development. And, you know, I think for all the criticisms of a House of Lords that is largely now populated by political patronage, actually, my experience of meeting the people in it is that there are some very clever, some very knowledgeable and some very experienced individuals in there who have the benefit of a huge amount of knowledge. And that, as a second house, is not a bad thing to have, actually.

**DT:** Your nomenclature, Richmond Hill, how did you decide on that?

**PH:** Well, we live there (laughs)! Well, it's a long story, too long for the article, but I can't be Lord Hendy because my brother is Lord Hendy. He's Lord Hendy, comma, of Hayes and Harlington, which is where he and I were brought up years ago. So, I had to be Lord Hendy of somewhere. And Richmond Hill is where we live. So, if people get upset by that, then they've got no reason to be because actually, we're residents. But I said,





All aboard the Hendy bus — one of the charity runs in action

well, I could have a comma, too. And the guy at the College of Arms said: ‘Yeah, you can have a comma.’ So that’s why I’ve got ‘of Imber in the county of Wiltshire’. And the story about Imber is a good story. Because every year, my mates and I run a bus service to Imber—one day a year. It started as a bit of a joke in 2010. Last year, we ran a service with 30-odd vehicles—we collected £40,000 in fares, all of which we give to charity, some to the church in Imber, because it’s in the middle of Salisbury Plain military training area. So, you can’t normally get to it. And nobody lives there. So, I thought, well, I can’t upset anybody if I put Imber in my name because nobody lives there. So that’s fine. So that’s what it is.

**DT:** It’s as simple as that. So that brings me to my last question which is about buses. So, you own a Routemaster...  
**PH:** Two!

**DT:** Two Routemasters? And you run these property drives? Tell me about that.

**PH:** We do. So, Peter Murray and I, we do three or four a year. One of them’s generally always the City, one’s the West End. We did one this year around Surrey Quays

with Roger Madelin for British Land. And we assemble developers, architects, planners and builders of new and changing buildings in a changing landscape. And as we go round, they give a commentary on what they’re doing and why, and value, and so on. Fantastically interesting. We do it three or four times a year. Peter charges a lot of money for them, which is great. And all the money that he raises through the bus trips we give to charity too. So, I reckon probably since we’ve been doing it, which must now be at least 10 years, we must have done 40 of them. And we probably raised £300,000-£400,000. And it’s good fun.

**DT:** So why two Routemasters? I mean, I’ve got seven bikes. I can’t talk...!

**PH:** Well, there you go. Well, that’s why I’ve got two Routemasters, because one’s not enough. We have a good time and I drive them myself. And I love driving. It’s one of one of my great relaxations, driving a bus in London.

**DT:** Brilliant. Thank you very much for your time.

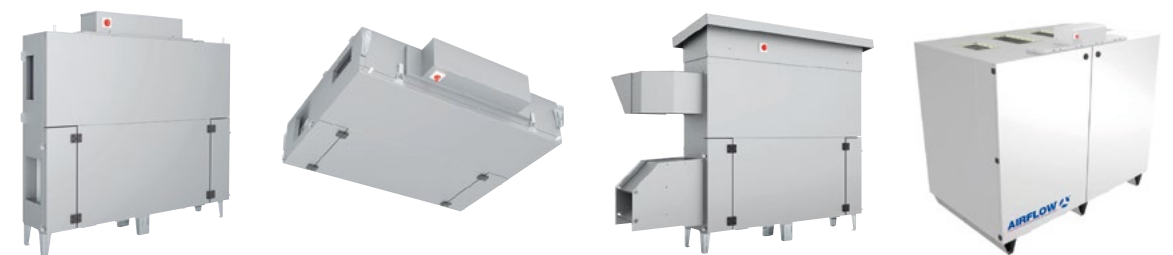
**PH:** Thank you! ●

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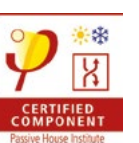


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# NOT JUST A PANTOMIME

*Professor Yolande Barnes reflects on the mayoralty, and what today’s leaders could learn from Dick Whittington...*



Not since the days of Richard (aka Dick) Whittington in the 14th century has the role of London’s mayor been quite so high-profile. Unlike Richard Whittington, who became an MP after completing four one-year terms, all three incumbents of the modern mayoralty since 2000 were sitting MPs first. Though of

course Whittington never went on to become a prime minister.

Although each of the modern mayors has had a very different style of governing, they all have had the same powers and remit, including strategic and transport planning and housing. Each mayor has therefore had the capability to significantly influence London’s built environment. Have they had more or less impact than the medieval mayor, Dick Whittington?

Whittington’s incumbencies lasted four years in all between 1397 and 1420. But in this short time, he was responsible for rebuilding Guildhall, building a hospital ward at St Thomas’, installing drainage systems around Billingsgate and Cripplegate, rebuilding a parish church, founding Greyfriars library and funding a 128-seater toilet called Whittington’s longhouse! Not only are some of the buildings still standing, 600 years later (sadly not the loo), but his personal charitable legacy is still in existence. It funded construction projects including rebuilding Newgate Prison and Newgate, building the first Guildhall library, repairing St Bartholomew’s Hospital and providing almshouses and drinking fountains. Whittington’s legacy has provided homes for the poor over six centuries. Even today, his legacy provides 74 social housing units, occupied by the elderly and managed by the Mercers’ Company.

This may look a lot less than the 6,189 council homes built in Greater London in the four years to 2023, but London’s population and economy were a great deal smaller in the late 14th century. London’s population in 1400 can only be estimated, but would have been no more than 50,000—180 times smaller than the current GLA population. The land area that Whittington controlled in 1397 was about 545 times smaller than the current area of Greater London, and the economy (at a guesstimate) was a mere one-thousandth of today’s London GVA (at today’s prices).

← City father — the Richard Whittington stained glass at Guildhall in the City of London

Scaling up according to land area, population or GVA, what Dick Whittington achieved was the equivalent of the entire GLA, in the past four years, providing between 13,320 and 74,000 social housing units to last 600 years, while being maintained and managed. This is a very tough act for any modern mayor to follow—could Sadiq or his successor learn anything from Dick?

Though an experienced moneylender, Whittington was dependent on funding from individual private donations and livery companies. There was no council tax levy, although the guilds would have been able to extract the equivalent of today’s business rates from their members. The medieval economy was less about income and expenditure on the annual, current account and more concerned with the long-term investment of scarce funds for public works. The provision of legacies, managed by the livery companies, went alongside the real assets for management, maintenance and, ultimately, renewal and redevelopment.

You could argue that Richard Whittington is still more powerful than any of the past three London mayors because of this. Despite distributing funds annually to various charitable causes over the past six centuries, the Whittington Charity had net assets of over £123 million in 2021 (generating income of nearly £4 million each year). Scale those assets up by the growth in the population of London since 1400 and that’s the equivalent of £22.1 billion. Scale it up by the area of modern-day London compared to medieval London and that’s as if Whittington had created a charitable fund of £67 billion—or £123 billion if you scale it up by the GDP of modern London compared to 14th-century London. Could any modern mayor have the same sort of impact as a medieval lord mayor?

According to the GLA consolidated budget published in March 2021, the mayor’s planned spending for 2021/22 was £13.8 billion. While acknowledging that this has to be spent on TfL, the police, fire services and a host of other commitments, I would suggest that any incoming mayor should be thinking not just how it should be spent but how it could be invested. How could the GLA end up owning both assets and endowments to maintain them?

Like the medieval mayor, the modern mayor will not be able to swell the public coffers alone. It will take persuasion, cajoling, calling in favours, quid pro quo and all the fund-raising and partnering techniques that our friend Dick, with or without his cat, must have employed.

The equivalent today is to partner with local authorities, private developers, third-sector organisations, investors and others to obtain stakes in big, hyper-mixed schemes and participate in the building of new parts of London. Just a small percentage of the income generated in coming decades, from dividends and/or business taxes on these schemes, could endow quite a few 21st-century almshouses...

This is not a simple proposition and requires particular skills from a modern mayor. Chief of these has to be approachability and a willingness to talk and negotiate with a very wide range of potential stakeholders. Interestingly, this is not unprecedented in the short history of the modern mayoralty. I am not thinking so much of Boris’s international blond cheerleader style of attracting inward investment, nor Sadiq’s earnest pursuit of social targets, but rather of Ken Livingstone. His ability to get a very wide variety of stakeholders around the table in 2005 not only enabled London to deliver the 2012 Olympics with supreme (and some might say surprising) efficiency but also delivered an amazing, long-term legacy of enormous proportions in the Olympic Park which will continue long into the future.

Any incoming mayor needs to think about the centuries-long legacy of every London development and how it will be funded, not just now but for decades and even centuries to come. They will need to think about who needs to be included around the mayoral table from the outset in order to achieve it—and be prepared to welcome partners from all sectors and other political stripes. In short, and with apologies to the female candidates, the next mayor needs to be a bit of a Dick. ●



A 19th-century engraving of Richard Whittington — and cat



# HARROW: PRESSING AHEAD

*Dipti Patel*, corporate director of place at the London Borough of Harrow, on how in challenging times, the local authority is working to achieve ‘good growth’



The past three years have been like no other. Our lives and ways of working have changed in an unprecedented way and the financial challenges for councils and our projects have been significant. Our viability assumptions have been tested, and with each passing month it feels as if a new challenge materialises. In this type of environment, it can feel that the only option is to stop and pause to wait out the uncertainty.

Should we wait for:

- Build costs to come down?
- Values to start to increase?
- Interest rates to reduce?
- International conflicts to settle?

The list goes on, but is the decision to pause the right one to make?

We develop our projects because they provide solutions for our communities, giving our residents access to good-quality homes, new infrastructure, facilities and open space. Our projects will bring investment and employment through our supply chains.

The global challenges have continued to place a toll on local economics, and this turmoil requires councils to find new and innovative ways to support their local needs. Our role is to

make a long-term difference to peoples’ lives, improving their physical environment for the better. In an uncertain market, waiting it out just isn’t an option. Now more than ever we need to provide a stable footing for our community, ensuring that their voices are heard.

In Harrow, we are doing this through our joint venture partnership with Wates Residential to bring forward development on key under-used council sites. Working with a private-sector partner allows us to bring forward the use of our land by using Wates’ construction expertise to help deliver viable new homes across our sites. New business plans have recently been approved allowing schemes to move forward on two of our three sites, providing more than 1,200 new homes, community facilities, open spaces and jobs.

With the recently completed first phase of our Grange Farm development we are learning and improving the viability and deliverability of the next two phases, increasing the number of homes in future phases of this council-owned estate and providing more people access to safe secure homes.

Strategically we are providing certainty to inward investment and development partners by starting our new local plan with regulation 18 consultation starting in February 2024 to set out our ambitions and policies for the borough.

This will be accompanied by masterplans for our key town centres, including Harrow on the Hill, already leading the way through our future high streets funding.

Harrow is a place with ambition. Put simply, we want more than growth. In Harrow, we want ‘good growth’, which to us means delivering the right type of development for our communities, taking them on the journey and showing them what it means for them and their families. We are actively involved in our development, putting in place things that we know will make a difference to our communities. We’re recruiting to new teams, and enhancing our internal expertise. This cannot wait. Our communities deserve it.



Approved — the Byron Quarter HSDP (Harrow Strategic Development Partnership) site with Wates Residential

# LAMBETH: WALKING THE WALK

Lambeth chief executive *Bayo Dosunmu* on his vision to make Lambeth a borough with social and climate justice at its heart



Lambeth is a borough with enormous opportunities for investment and growth. We have a world-class cultural offer—from the South Bank to the beating heart of Brixton—world-leading med-tech research, a pipeline of A-grade, highly sustainable new commercial buildings and Europe’s biggest cluster of low-carbon entrepreneurs.

Our population is young and highly skilled, we have easy public transport and cycle routes to what—for London—are relatively affordable places to live, and we are home to one of the UK’s busiest mainline stations.

We recognise the importance of growth in realising our vision for a fairer, greener Lambeth. Our borough plan *Lambeth 2030: Our future, our Lambeth* sets out our commitment and ambition to make Lambeth a borough with social and climate justice at its heart—a climate-resilient borough where people can lead healthier, happier lives. Growth that cannot achieve this is not good growth, in my opinion.

Lambeth was the first London borough to declare a climate emergency, and is on a path to reducing its carbon footprint to zero by 2030, having created a citizens’ assembly and published its first report calling for bold and urgent action.

We’ve invested in the creation of Europe’s largest single cluster of low-carbon enterprises—with our sustainable workspaces project transforming two floors of County Hall to bring 750 green economy jobs to the borough. This is part of a concerted effort to support green economy growth in Lambeth, underpinned by our green economy growth strategy, which will be formally launched in March 2024.

Vauxhall Island is a transformational project for what is a critical piece of the London economy and cultural community. The development itself will achieve a huge array of public benefits for Vauxhall, and for London and the UK, through the creation of a new town centre, with more than 200,000 square feet (c. 18,600 sqm) of office space, 257 homes, and a 618-room hotel. The Island Site also enables the removal of the Vauxhall Gyratory, which currently blights the Vauxhall area. Through the re-modelling of the gyratory, we can unlock further benefits—over half a million square feet (c. 46,500 sqm) of office space and over 5,000 new jobs, capable of generating £417 million additional GVA per annum.

But we need greater public and private sector investment to unlock this opportunity. We must continue to work with



Lambeth — the Vauxhall Cross Island project

partners across the UK to make the case for investment in the capital. The impacts of Brexit, COVID and the cost-of-living crises have exacerbated inequality. Levelling up is needed for communities in London, not just the regions.

Another enormous opportunity in the borough is the Royal Street development, just awarded planning permission, which will be the largest life-sciences-focused development in the capital. Spanning 5.5 acres (2.2ha) of land near Westminster Bridge, this mixed-use scheme will provide 133 new homes, 50 per cent of which affordable, alongside more than 1.5 million square feet (c.140,000 sqm) of office space (including lab-enabled space), low-cost and discounted workspace for organisations in the life-sciences sector, along with retail, leisure and community uses.

Growth can also mean reimagining what our places and spaces can look and feel like. I am particularly proud of our kerbside strategy, which removes the assumption that the space next to the pavement is primarily for cars. We’re so used to the kerbside being like this that it can be hard to imagine anything different, but change is necessary and possible. We’ve reframed the problem, redefining this area as the largest public space in the borough, with enormous potential to support resilience to climate change. Our strategy identifies 579 linear kilometres of kerbside and sets a target to reclaim 25 per cent of that space from car storage—for bike parking, parklets and trees.

With strong political leadership and a skilled and experienced team, we are ready to deliver the growth that the borough needs—but growth with equity and justice at its heart. ●



# IN THE COMFORT ZONE

David Taylor travels to Austria and Switzerland to witness projects where architect Baumschlager Eberle is pioneering an innovative, ultra-low energy approach: 2226



Something big is happening in Lustenau.

Why? Because this little-known town in western Austria is where architect Baumschlager Eberle has finished 10 years of monitoring on a mixed-use building it designed largely for itself with a revolutionary, highly sustainable concept called 2226. And the good news is that this way of creating buildings—which slashes construction and operation costs and maintains temperatures between 22 and 26 degrees Celsius without any mechanical heating or cooling—works. And it's coming to London.

The guinea pig building is the practice's own, but also has space for other tenants including a yoga and pilates studio, gym, plastic surgeon's offices, a ground-floor art gallery and a café space, as well as the architects' dedicated team pushing this technology. And 10 years of data shows that despite not having any heating system, cooling system or mechanical ventilation, the temperatures and humidity levels have remained largely within a comfortable range throughout the year, no matter the temperature outside. This makes for a pleasant, human-centred and comfortable environment. What's more, by using sensors, deep (80cm) facades, large windows but deep reveals and automatically opening ventilation flaps integrated into the deep-set frames of the fixed glazed windows, rather than suspended ceilings or other plant, the building has much cleaner lines, aesthetically, and more space devoted to users. It's a natural building, inspired by castles, that if replicated elsewhere could contribute to the global push towards net zero.

Dietmar Eberle, founder of the German practice, says this revolutionary technology has many potential applications, not least in dramatically reducing lifecycle costs of buildings across other typologies and geographies.

'First, it's about comfort,' he says. 'Second, carbon dioxide footprint and energy demand. Third is about lifecycle costs. These are for me the big advantages.'

Eberle says that people working in the 10-year-old building feel 'quite well', especially comparing this new, more 'natural' and 'comfortable' environment to other workplaces. Illnesses are 'nearly nothing', except for one staffer, Eberle chuckles, who broke his leg in a skiing accident. People like fresh air, because there is a higher level of oxygen, so, he asks, why shouldn't inside air be more like outside?

So, if it is so good, why hasn't this approach taken off so far?

It's radical, says Eberle, and science normally takes a generation to take hold. COVID also applied a brake on advances. Even so, the firm is working on around 40 projects using the technology across France, Germany, Switzerland, Austria and Poland. 'Sure, I would like to do it much more. But now what is important is that we do it now for very big professional clients.' These include a 300,000sq ft

(c. 2,787 sqm) headquarters for SPS, the most prominent developer in Switzerland and for a private university.

Eberle goes on to praise the way the software can adapt conditions to the needs of different users, and believes that the technology can be used all over the world, apart from areas with very high humidity like, say, Hong Kong or Singapore. 'In Great Britain, it would be perfect.' Hence why the firm is creating a new office in London, serving the wishes of some of the firm's staff at the same time. One of those staff members is Daniel Pöhner, an ex-Foster & Partners architect who currently works from the firm's Paris office and is looking to bring this technology and the wider Baumschlager Eberle approach to a new office in London, amid ongoing feasibility work with interested developers. He agrees with Eberle's assessment of 2226's worth, not least for the obvious benefits shown in the original scheme.

'Because it has no mechanical ventilation, but also because of the simplicity of the construction methodology, it was 25 per cent less expensive than a comparable conventional building. It's not a machine anymore,' he says of such buildings and the contrast with overly controlled environments. 'It's a living organism.'

What is more, says 2226 project engineer Sebastian Nödl, who looks after the software and algorithms governing when the motors open and close the vents, the building's flexibility to adapt to other users also lends it to longer lifecycles of perhaps 200 years. 'It's really neutral in use,' he says. For the three months that he has been working at Lustenau, Nödl has been able to look in depth at data that shows that, as long as people are using the spaces, temperatures and humidity levels are clearly running between the software's upper and lower limits. He also offers that the space—although noisy in places, given the hard surfaces—provides a largely healthier environment, even if this is anecdotal rather than gleaned

from data on sick days or similar. Nödl reports that his own hayfever has considerably improved though, because the system allows less pollen into the building. 'It is healthier, and you can work more efficiently,' he says, adding that lifecycle costs are reduced by around 50 per cent too, and there are fewer 'shocks' between outside and inside temperature.

The 2226 technology is not the only design solution the practice offers, but it is the one it recommends, not least for the savings it offers by creating simple buildings, less reliant on plant and designed with an attractive, simple facade. But they also offer a major element in the fight for sustainability—flexibility.

Managing director of the architect's Lustenau office Stephane Corona adds that the feedback has been good from staff. With his surname he might also have noted that in buildings without air conditioning the recycling of airborne viruses and bacteria is also reduced.



Dietmar Eberle — back to basics





Light touch — the café space at the mixed-use building in Lustenau, Austria



Large windows and computer-controlled ventilation flaps help to maintain temperatures between 22 and 26 degrees celsius, all year round



The under-construction JED project in Zurich, which takes the principle into a larger scale

We travel on to Schlieren, a suburb of Zurich in Switzerland, to view an under-construction project called JED. The acronym apparently stands for ‘join, explore, dare’, and the project offers a number of spaces across its 20,000 sqm innovation campus, on a former printing plant site by the rail track, including ground- and first-floor zones devoted to shared lab spaces. These do have additional mechanical cooling units, due to the nature of the job in hand. But the point is that if this tenant no longer wants the space, it can be easily returned to the kinds of scenarios enjoyed on the upper floors by a co-working client, which welcomes the ease of use and low-operating cost solution. The occupier was taken by the building’s openable flaps alongside its triple-glazing sections, which were thoroughly tested through simulation and a scale mock-up outside. This mock-up also clearly shows the porous brick solution—one layer of loadbearing, one of non-loadbearing, lined with lime render, and repeated across the building. The client was no doubt also impressed by the rooftop garden, solar array and simple services, all with a double horseshoe plan that allows for outdoor terraces.

The project—which includes flexible, rentable lab space and co-working—completes this summer and was marginally faster to build than other schemes because of its thicker walls but less equipment, according to Stephan Marending, managing partner of Baumschlag Eberle’s Zurich office. The scheme is being hailed as ‘probably the most resource-efficient workspace in Switzerland’, boasting ‘healthy architecture, implemented with uncontaminated materials’ to ensure the ‘perfect well-being of its users’. The users, together with devices and lighting, serve as the heat source, which combines with the architecture and massive structure and its thermal storage capacity, while the intelligent building control regulates temperature, CO2 content and humidity automatically through those ventilation flaps.

Our final example of this technology as a building in use is Zodas, the central Swiss organisation for social work, in Emmenbrücke, a training school which has been in operation for some years now. Headteacher Claudia Wüest reports that it has been so successful that it now forms part of the syllabus. (see box out on the following page)

The 2226 process is clearly applicable to many more locations, but obviously would struggle where the night air is not cool enough to cool the heat of the day. It’s built on thick walls, deep window recesses and a ventilation system automatically controlled by software that the firm has developed itself. It has the expertise and experience, and indeed copyright in this area, although of course the general principle is copiable.

Ultimately, the 2226 principle seems one answer to living in harmony with our surroundings, without the environmentally costly trappings of mechanical heating or cooling. Welcome to the comfort zone.



The 18,000 sqm JED scheme features ceiling heights of up to 3.79m





**A tenant speaks**

*Claudia Wüest runs the Zoda school in Emmenbrücke, Switzerland, which employed Baumschlager Eberle to create a 2226 building for its teachers. How has it fared?*

**NLQ: How do you explain the technical aspects of the building to the students?**

**Claudia Wüest:** When the students (most of them are aged between 16 and 18) come to one of our classes for the first time, we give them an introductory talk, which includes the building. We ask them if they know why the walls are so thick. Then we explain that the building has no heating and that what these thick walls do is store the heat generated during the summer by their presence and by the equipment in the room (laptops, lights, video projectors, etc.). Then I run my hand over the wall and point out the white paint to them. I explain that it is a limewash paint that is able to store and give off heat, just like the bare concrete floor can. I also explain that we have an automatic ventilation system that is activated in the summer. As soon as the oxygen content of the air falls below a certain level, the ventilation slits open automatically.

**NLQ: What is their general feedback? Anything surprising?**

**CW:** The students are surprised that it is possible. Above all, they are surprised that they are not supposed to lean against the walls. Feedback about the temperature varies. Our classes are very hands-on, and the students move about a lot. When that is the case, the temperature is very pleasant, even in winter. When the students (they are mostly girls) have to sit

down and write or talk, then they find the winter temperature a little cool. In the summer, they perceive the temperature as extremely pleasant; incredibly pleasant compared to outside. They really appreciate the large rooms and the space they have to move around and work in.

**NLQ: How has it performed? How are the acoustics?**

**CW:** Initially we had some problems — the rooms were very echoey. In addition to curtains, we've also installed some baffle boards and now the acoustics are much better.

**NLQ: Have you noticed any particular advantages in their health, attitude or educational performance?**

**CW:** No, the students are not with us for long enough for that (they only spend about 20 days with us over a period of three years). We have noticed, however, that most of the students take an active role in class. We've seen a difference compared to the old building. I'm convinced that these spacious, high-ceilinged rooms play a part in that.

**NLQ: What are your own thoughts about how the building contributes to how your teaching staff do their jobs? Can you compare it to other environments you have experienced?**

**CW:** I am convinced that the light and airy rooms encourage the teaching staff to think more creatively, and to use creative methods and materials. The rooms motivate the teaching staff, and us, to try new things. I think that's clear to see. I have taught in rooms that were very oppressive, a far cry from these bright, spacious rooms. The air is pleasant and, as I said before, it is never (or almost never) too hot. This has a positive and beneficial effect on how our students behave, and on our teachers. ●

Marcel A. Mayer

# making places



Regent's Place



Exchange Square



King's Cross

Scan to find out more





# HOUSING, YOUNG PEOPLE, AND A WAR ON ‘GROT’

David Taylor reports on NLA’s Sounding Board and their hopes for London issues from national government and the mayor

Housing and young people should be the key priorities for the election manifestoes of political parties in the upcoming elections—both this year’s general election and the vote for London mayor this May.

But better local authority funding and devolution of power, an emphasis on green industry, social justice, a review of taxes, improved relationships with the rest of the world and transport upgrades like the West London Orbital rail line come in close behind. All that, along with a ‘war on grot’—reducing the number of commercial waste-collecting companies to one per borough and ending the ‘destruction’ of parts of the city by utility firms.

‘These are tiny things that cost the government nothing’ said the latter idea’s proposer, Tony Travers of the LSE. ‘They cause terrible detriment and the poorer you are, the worse your neighbourhood will be’.

Travers was speaking as part of a roundtable discussion with other members of NLA’s Sounding Board session where the panel was asked for their priorities for the capital in the run-up to the general and mayoral elections.

Travers had earlier suggested that the planning system should be reformed, along with the creation of new incentives for local people to benefit from development, and his belief that the commuter rail system and its ‘dismal’ stations should be brought under TfL’s charge.

The GLA’s Louise Duggan felt that a ‘fair deal for London’ was needed, with ‘pragmatic problem-solving’ between the capital and national government, but that the next period in cities is going to be about the climate crisis, as well as those affecting health and mental health. Kat Hanna of Avison Young, felt that London needs greater assurance on local authority finance, both in terms of the ability of local authorities to deliver services and to provide the people and resources to ensure that London’s built environment can continue to evolve. Binki Taylor of the Brixton Project suggested that devolution of money and therefore power to a local and regional level could be a help to local authorities, but also yearned for a ‘greater focus on the rights and needs of children and young people’, mental health and social care. Cath Shaw of the London Borough of Barnet agreed on the issue of funding local government adequately. ‘If you want the country to survive and thrive economically you do actually need London to work’, she said. ‘So it’s not an either-or; it’s a build-on. it’s an ecosystem’. Shaw also pointed to specific rail projects such as the West London

orbital rail line to help unlock housing and connect people to work, along with the environmental benefits it would bring.

Housing was a recurring theme, Fletcher Priest’s Dipa Joshi raising the particular problem of temporary housing and the young, as well as how the housing shortage affects people from different backgrounds, their mental health and wellbeing.

For LCA’s Robert Gordon Clark, the government needed to review council tax—how it is levied and charged and how property is valued, along with another look at business rates. ‘It is an outrage that very rich people get away with paying very little amounts for their enormous expensive properties’, he said. ‘It’s dry and dull, but actually underpins a lot of what we’re talking about’.

Martyn Evans of LandsecU+I continued the theme of government instigating more of a fair deal for young people. ‘I’d like to see a great big basket of measures that are all focused on one dominant goal of giving young people a better start in their working life, post-education’, he said. This could involve looking at the affordability of living, and transport costs. Evans added that London could benefit from the kind of responses it made in the post-COVID period in opening streets, encouraging outdoor eating and employing other measures to make the capital ‘fun’ and ‘liveable’ again.

Laura Citron of London & Partners felt that London needs to have certainty, along with things that are multi-year, predictable, and global, rather than internally focused. ‘Our great strength is that we are an open, international, global trading nation, and we need to return a lot of our civic energy to our relationships with the rest of the world’, she said.

Kemi Oguntoye of Inside the Box Advisory pointed to the potential for removing the charges for going through the Blackwall tunnel as a specific policy, along with improvements to the tube, particularly to southeast London, and, again, measures to allow the boroughs to build more housing.

Robert Evans suggested that a long-term view on housing and its funding was needed beyond the election cycle, perhaps with the instigation of a commission, whilst addressing a growing challenge of ‘generational inequity’. Evans added that there should be more investment in green industry.

On a similar theme, Sunand Prasad of Perkins&Will and UKGBC talked of the climate and the need to reframe the



Portlands Place, 524 new build-to-rent homes in East Village designed by Hawkins\Brown for Get Living London

issue in a way that minimises the impact of the culture wars away from ‘doom and gloom’, regulation and compulsion, ‘and more towards the opportunity it represents to renew our city’. ‘If you combine the imperative of retrofit and climate emergency, the need in some areas of London where there is really bad, crumbling infrastructure and services, there’s a really good, positive story to tell’, he said. Within that there are things to say on skills, growth and green industries, added Prasad.

Lucy Musgrave of Publica said there should be a greater focus on collaboration with organisations like LETI, and more consensus-building across sectors, with carbon and social justice high on the agenda in the capital.

## ‘We need to return a lot of our civic energy to our relationships with the rest of the world’

Finally, before he presented the New London Agenda, Nick McKeogh of NLA suggested that affordable housing should be thought of as infrastructure, with more emphasis across borough boundaries. ●



# HIGH IDEALS

*Jo Bacon, Allies and Morrison, NLA Tall Buildings Expert Panel chair*

**What is your proudest achievement and why?**

I am really proud to have been a partner at Allies and Morrison and help guide the practice for more than 20 years, and to have continued to be engaged in projects while taking the role of managing partner. I’ve still had time to enjoy family life, dig in my garden and make the odd pot of marmalade! Recently I was kindly told, by someone I mentored nearly 20 years ago, how great it was to have a female mentor who had no qualms about telling a client that they really would leave a meeting on time to make sure they could read a bedtime story, or looking quizzically at someone who thought leadership could not be achieved in four days a week. I have been fortunate to work on schools, listed buildings, university departments, an embassy, hotels, offices and 100 Bishopsgate, a 40-storey tower in the City of London. And I’m proud that we have achieved a balance of 50:50 male to female staff—certainly something to celebrate. I like making things happen and I am not very good at sitting down!

**What would you have been if you hadn’t chosen the path you did?**

While I was in the sixth form my father told me that ‘women make bloody awful architects’. Therefore, my advice to all parents is not to direct the careers of their children as one is inclined to find they will do the opposite. My ‘A’ levels included maths, French, art, and textiles and design—so I suspect that if I had not secured a place at architecture school, I might have pursued a career in fashion, tailoring or costume design. I still make the odd item of clothing and love collecting beautifully cut Jean Muir pieces on eBay.

**What or who has been the biggest influence on your career thus far?**

Bob Allies was my tutor in my fifth year at Cambridge. Anyone who knows Bob will know that he is as thoughtful, dedicated and uplifting a person as can be. As a student, I recall dropping

behind with my work and Bob encouraging me to take the best of my project home and just persevere, put the hours in, work it through and deliver the required drawings for the beginning of term. Still, after any design review with Bob, in the 40 years since that conversation, it has always meant looking at a problem a different way, improving the plan and never leaving feeling discouraged. Indeed, he is a promoter of always doing something better.



An ally to the professions — Jo Bacon

**What would your advice be to those starting out in your profession?**

Firstly, draw, draw, draw and keep up that skill so you can communicate ideas anywhere, at any time—all you need is a pencil. Architecture school taught us to enquire, draw, reflect and review, and do that all again until the work is good. Secondly, always work for people whose work or approach inspires you.

**How would you describe London’s relationship with tall buildings?**

Culturally tricky, which is a pity. Either this is a reaction to tall buildings not being cultural landmarks such as Wren’s churches, or it’s a lack of experience of the joys and benefits of living close together

and closer to the sky. I lived in tall buildings, with 20 or more floors, at the age of six in Honolulu, as a parent in Hong Kong and more recently in London as an ‘empty nester’. None of these experiences were negative and all involved great communities within the blocks. Before the Second World War bombing of Victoria Street there were very tall gracious mansion blocks of 16 storeys and no one was grumbling then about tall buildings or the skyline—they were enjoying the benefits of more compact living right in the heart of London, with easy access to transport, in what was then a great street. Tall buildings are not just a modern or contemporary phenomenon—they have been an intrinsic part of London’s changing character for centuries. I can’t quite get why London still finds that tricky!

**And how are they viewed by the public?**

Good tall buildings make good spaces as they meet the city at the ground. It is almost more important to focus on this impact on the street as on the skyline view. The problem is where public space is of poor quality. People and businesses are returning to the City of London now to visit the cultural offer, let alone the bars, restaurants and nightclubs. They enjoy the alleys, the colonnades and spaces at the foot of tall buildings as well as the rooftops—probably rarely looking up—and only on the way home have time or distance to contemplate the skyline. Tall buildings can be an emotive and divisive issue, reflected in the typically fraught nature of the public consultation process revolving around recurring themes (local character, good growth, sustainability or change fatigue). They do need careful placement in response to our city’s historic character and ordinarily much of what we do, at Allies and Morrison, is to advocate a mix of building types—some of which may be tall where appropriate.

**What can we learn from other cities about going tall?**

New York and Chicago’s heritage of masonry and contextual tall buildings has been a source of inspiration for us.

**What is your favourite tall building and why?**

My favourite tall building in London, not designed by Allies and Morrison, is the Barbican.

**How would you characterise London’s main challenge from a built environment perspective?**

We need to build a fairer, more sustainable city. We need new innovative types of building and construction that are safe, easily maintained and low-carbon (both embodied and in use)—but they also need to be empathetic, mediating between the historic and contemporary. The pressure to optimise the use of urban land across London will always be acute. This is essential in helping address housing needs in the capital. But there is also a growing appreciation of the need to do so in a way that respects and contributes positively to local character and London’s overall identity as a unique place.

**And how do you think London will respond?**

The London Plan’s ‘Good Growth’ agenda and promotion of the concept of ‘gentle density’ are a good start. Growth strategies and character studies should become more interwoven into the design of tall buildings. That’s my hope at least.

**You champion equality and diversity in practice. How is the profession faring, currently?**

There are many champions for diversity and inclusion at Allies and Morrison—I cannot take that credit. It is totally part of what our whole team believes in. The demonstration of this is our diversity statement which was written by our staff—a ground-up initiative with many participants. So, in direct response to that initiative, we are recruiting at least 50 per cent of our new graduates from underrepresented backgrounds. Particularly in a diverse city like London, architecture needs every practice to field a similar

commitment. But it is discouraging that parents you meet at school careers fairs are pretty clear that they would rather encourage their children to join other professions where the financial rewards are more consistent and less often affected by recession. Salary levels and visas remain a challenge in attracting diverse talent.

**How can it improve?**

We need to be more confident as a profession in standing our ground on the benefits of our intellectual property and the value that we bring to our clients.

**What are your hopes for Allies and Morrison over the coming years?**

We are becoming a more global practice, with the new generation of partners very much leading this diverse portfolio. We all continue to love the breadth of our work, from masterplans to detailed historic restoration projects. It has always made every day interesting, and it is always really exciting. My hope is that we can maintain that dedication to resolving problems for our clients at the macro and micro scale to deliver humane, flexible and delightful places for people. We have now retrofitted some of our own buildings that were completed 20-plus years ago with the same love and attention they were given the first time around. I hope that Allies and Morrison continues to be inspirational to our peers and students as well as to our clients, who know what they really get is thoughtful solutions that deliver long-term value.

## ‘We need to build a fairer, more sustainable city’

**What hopes do you have for the area you work in following a general and mayoral election?**

In the past few years, I have had the privilege of working on some sites around railway stations. We should continue to invest in these places to create excellent transport hubs that stitch diverse parts of London more closely together. City mayors and central government can target investment in infrastructure to these sites. Arriving at a great station is your front door to the city and that first impression carries so many opportunities. Our rail network is the sustainable transport network that should link up the culturally rich and exciting regions all over the UK.

**Which sectors do you see as being growth areas?**

For the health and wellbeing of our country this has to be housing, and I hope that we will see a new generation of developers pushing innovation in this space.

**What do you see in your crystal ball for London more generally?**

Fewer cars. More walking. Higher densities, but generous densities. ●



# FRINGE BENEFITS

We look at Norton Folgate — a 335,000 sq ft mixed use scheme of eight buildings including shops, bars and restaurants alongside offices

Masterplanner: **Allford Hall Monaghan Morris**

Developer: **British Land**

Occupier: **Reed Smith**



## THE MASTERPLANNER'S ACCOUNT

**Paul Monaghan**

Founding director,  
Allford Hall Monaghan Morris

The Norton Folgate site, comprising three urban blocks, sits within the Elder Street conservation area and occupies a prominent position within the city fringe between the City of London and Shoreditch. While the conservation area is small, there are dramatic changes in character from one street to the next. The masterplan has been developed to respond to this mixed character, bringing vacant or under-used buildings back into use and reconnecting and enhancing the public realm.

Rather than applying a blanket strategy, the masterplan employs a building-by-building approach to the retained existing buildings, using restoration, refurbishment, extension, remodelling and facade retention to breathe new life into the architecture. Sensitively designed new buildings have been introduced in a palette of materials, including brick which was selected for its robustness, quality and appropriateness for the conservation area's character.

Given the variegated character of Norton Folgate, four different architecture practices were brought together to

diversify the architectural approach and style. Allford Hall Monaghan Morris (AHMM) was appointed as masterplanner and designed three buildings, namely Blossom Yard and Studios, Nicholls and Clarke, and Loom Court, while Stanton Williams, Morris + Company, and DSDHA designed Elder Yard, 15 Norton Folgate and 16 Blossom Street respectively, with East leading the public realm strategy.

Across the six buildings, a range of office types, with retail at ground level, has been created with the aim of attracting tenants from start-ups and SMEs to mature organisations, and appealing to the local tech and creative industries. The public realm design enhances the tight network of existing streets and creates three new yard spaces that draw on the character of the surrounding historic blocks.

Blossom Yard is the largest building in the masterplan, delivering approximately one third of the new commercial space. The building is accessed from the busy Bishopsgate through Blossom Yard, with new flexible offices and terraces on each floor that overlook the piazza of Principal Place. AHMM's design incorporates a modern brick warehouse aesthetic, drawing on the historic refurbished warehouses on the site, with ceramic panels that reference the cladding of the former Nicholls and Clarke showroom and the company's long association with the site.



The complex Norton Folgate site including the large Blossom Yard offices, retail and restaurant building (left, middle)





The view up Folgate Street, with 16 Blossom Street and 15 Norton Folgate



Elder Yard



The view from Shoreditch High Street, with Nichols and Clarke building and Blossom Yard on the left



The view from Norton Folgate of 15 Norton Folgate and Blossom Yard



**THE DEVELOPER’S ACCOUNT**  
**David Lockyer**  
Head of development, British Land

British Land’s development of Norton Folgate—a £225 million office-led development along with restaurants, cafés and shops, a short walk from Liverpool Street station and our Broadgate campus—is one of the most complex yet special projects we’ve ever delivered.

Its mix of Georgian and Victorian buildings, set around historic courtyards and cobbled streets, feels very different from its city fringe surroundings, and we’ve been clear from the outset that we want to preserve this DNA, retaining the street pattern, preserving and restoring buildings and creating something for now and the future.

The pandemic accelerated the trend towards hybrid working. While it’s here to stay, businesses still want office space—but they are looking for high-quality, sustainable and well-located homes to attract and retain talent. Occupiers want better end-of-trip facilities for the growing numbers of cyclists, more breakout spaces for collaboration, central locations near key transport hubs, and great leisure and retail nearby.

These requirements are all met by Norton Folgate. Designed by award-winning architects, its workspaces have both historic character and impressive sustainability credentials (56 per cent lower embodied carbon than benchmarks, all electricity from renewable sources and nearly 4,000 people trained and upskilled).

Law firm Reed Smith is the first client to take workspace at Blossom Yard, leasing eight floors of new offices and

a connected three-floor converted warehouse. Blossom Yard, designed by AHMM, provides 127,000 sq ft (c. 11,800 sqm) of offices and 7,400 sq ft (c. 687 sqm) of retail.

The other buildings include: Elder Yard, with 74,000 sq ft (c. 6,875 sqm) of offices and 8,000 sq ft (c. 743 sqm) of retail; 15 Norton Folgate, with 11,900 sq ft (c. 1,100 sqm) of offices and 3,400 sq ft (c. 325 sqm) of retail; 16 Blossom Street, with 16,600 sq ft (c.1,545 sqm) and 4,350 sq ft (c.400 sqm) of retail; Nicholls and Clarke building, with 26,750 sq ft (c.2,485 sqm) of offices and 3,390 sq ft (c.315 sqm) of retail; Loom Court with 47,200 sq ft (c.4,385 sqm) of offices and 1,800 sq ft (c.167 sqm) of retail.

We were keen not to deliver a homogenised office complex, so appointed a raft of different architects to design Norton Folgate’s buildings. Retention was a key element of the scheme, so we devoted our time to discussing this and the four teams of architects worked brilliantly together to find the best solutions.

The enabling works began in April 2019. Despite the challenges of COVID and preserving buildings and streets in central London, the project ran fairly smoothly. This is partly due to the values we instilled within the team: be open and honest; do what’s right, not what’s easy; and have difficult conversations early. We have stuck to these values throughout our five years together.

Norton Folgate is a unique destination whose character, which we worked hard to preserve, provides something that no other buildings in the surrounding area can—a sense of history within a modern, sustainable workspace for businesses of all sectors and sizes.





The view from Principal Place of Blossom Yard and Nichols and Clarke building



#### THE OCCUPIER'S ACCOUNT

**Andrew Jenkinson**

Managing partner,  
Reed Smith London office

The COVID pandemic led to fundamental changes in the way we work together, which led us to rethink the space we need for the future and how we can use that creatively. We selected Blossom Yard and Studios, part of the wider Norton Folgate development, as it is a truly unique proposition that embodies our distinct culture and helps us stand out from our peers. Blossom Yard reflects who we are—a progressive law firm with a prestigious history and a collegiate and innovative approach.

The buildings were chosen because they best matched the firm's requirements for the highest-quality, cutting-edge working environment but with a unique character and feel. They blend the old and the new, with architects carefully restoring the existing Georgian and Victorian warehouses, showcasing and preserving their industrial features while also delivering new buildings that complement their environment.

In many ways, we've gone against the grain of 'big law' by not remaining in one of the tallest skyscrapers in the City, but we couldn't be more excited about the move. We've been designing our new office in consensus with our people to provide a mix of both work and social environments, as well as a focus on wellness. It's also been developed to the highest

sustainable standards. The new office will be a net-zero carbon development and have an 'excellent' BREEAM rating.

None of this would have been possible had we remained in our current office. The upcoming move has given us a chance to reflect on what the optimal office looks like for now and in the future. We've used the lessons learned from COVID to select the perfectly crafted canvas of Blossom Yard to apply the finishing touches of collaborative design and cutting-edge technology that will enable our people to flourish in their new environment.

## 'We've used the lessons learned from COVID to select the perfectly crafted canvas of Blossom Yard'

While our new office itself is of course the main draw, the wider development will provide five new restaurants/café's, a bar and eight shops, so there will be a real buzz around the place—like there is about the move internally.

We're building a destination office for the post-pandemic world, and we can't wait to be there. ●

Timothy Soar; Hutton + Crow



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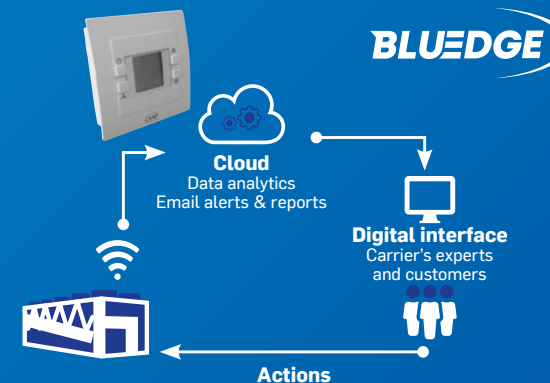
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# LONG LIFE

We take a look at Cobham Bowers in Surrey, a later living community with a sustainable approach at its heart

Client: **Lifestory Group**  
Architect: **Coffey Architects**  
Interior designer: **Love Interiors**  
Landscape architect: **UBU Design**







Cobham Mews features communal spaces and extensive balconies

**THE CLIENT'S ACCOUNT****Chris Powell**

Chief operating officer, Lifestory Group

When we acquired the former Glashauss building, previously the office of an international insurance company, we knew we had the potential to create a vibrant community in one of the most sought-after locations in Surrey. Working alongside Coffey Architects and other technical specialists, we were able to make that vision a reality.

Located near Painshill Park, with Cobham village centre less than 10 minutes' walk, Pegasus Cobham

Bowers is a welcoming sanctuary for residents from the moment you step through the front door into the pavilion.

We recognise that many people choose to move into later living housing after a significant life event—the loss of a partner, or when looking after the family home becomes too much to manage. So, it was important that we created an environment that felt safe and welcoming, recognising the challenges people may have faced.

As with all our communities, understanding the local context was paramount, from the design of the building and how it interacted with those around it, to the outside space within the community, and looking further afield to the local park, recreation ground and bowling green nearby.

Reflecting the concept used in Painshill Park, a walled garden sits between the two private residential buildings in the community, a focus of the communal and shared spaces. This area is enjoyed throughout the day and night with yoga or Pilates in the studio space, croquet on the lawn and cocktails in the garden. As much for one person to visit with a newspaper to be on their own, as a large group wanting to be with others, this space is flexible and versatile, as the communal spaces were intended to be when they were first envisaged.

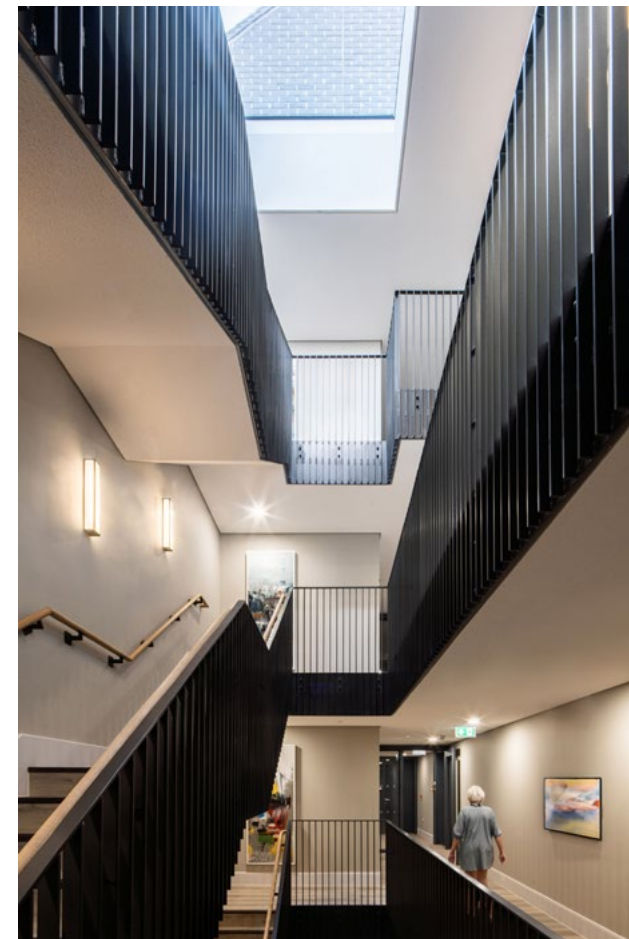
It's important to recognise that it is not just about how a building looks, it is about how it works on the inside too. One design feature, intended to create communities within a community, has proven to be a real success, where clusters of four apartments share a lobby area

to create places for social interaction at a smaller scale. The orientation of the buildings has meant that light shines through and makes a huge difference, even during the darkest months of the year.

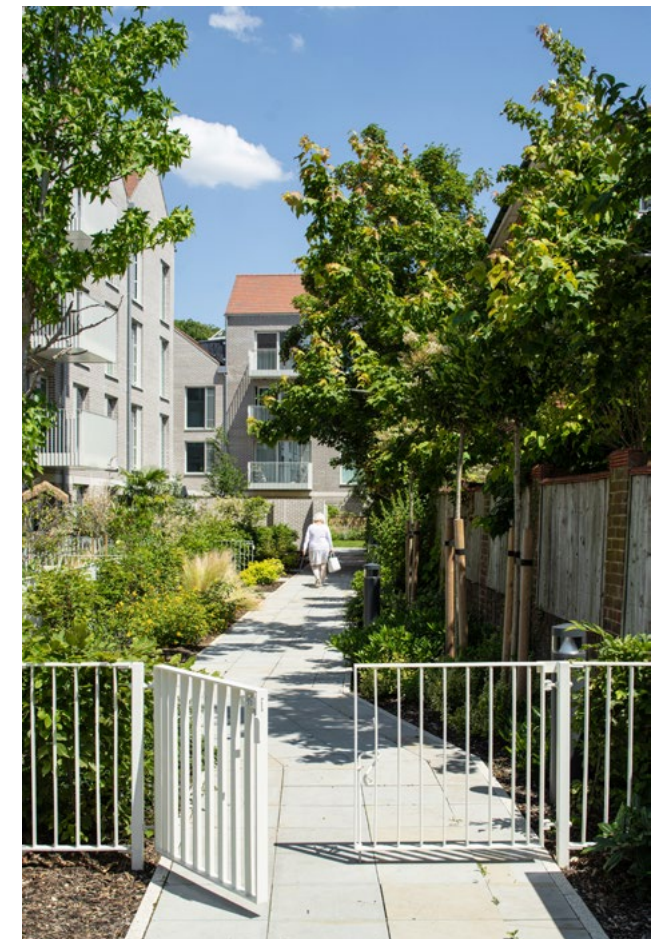
The project was not without its challenges. First, we had planning permission refused by Elmbridge Borough Council's planning committee and determined at appeal, after concerns raised by the local authority and elected members about the loss of an employment site. Then the pandemic struck during the construction phase. But all those issues are distant memories, when you sit in the communal lounge with residents at a coffee morning, in the place they are proud to call home.



A walled garden sits between the two private residential buildings in the community



An open space adjacent to the staircase and skylight allows sunlight in



'It was important that we created an environment that felt safe and welcoming'





The scheme includes a central communal pavilion that connects residents with each other, and with nature



#### THE ARCHITECT'S ACCOUNT

**Phil Coffey**

Founding director, Coffey Architects

Coffey's approach to designing Cobham Bowers was focused on creating a tailored living experience for residents while

integrating environmental considerations. The project aims to foster a vibrant and inclusive community, with careful attention to experience, wellbeing and holistic sustainability.

Upon arrival, residents are welcomed by a central communal pavilion set within a flint-walled garden. This garden serves as a peaceful sanctuary with a welcoming scale and material choice. The pavilion, strategically designed to maximise natural light and views of the surrounding landscape, functions as a communal hub. It aims to connect residents not only with each other but also with the natural environment, offering a space for communal activities and interactions.

The project places a strong emphasis on the concept of a journey and a connection to the environment. Light and landscape play crucial roles in creating a living experience where residents feel continuously connected to the natural rhythms of the day. This connection with the outdoors is essential for a community where residents may spend significant time indoors and encouraging them to step outside is essential for their well-being.

The journey continues from the central pavilion to individual homes. Large staircase atriums and lobbies are designed to allow the infiltration of natural light, creating vibrant circulation spaces that encourage residents to pause, interact and communicate. Once inside their individual homes,

residents are provided with stunning views of the landscape that surrounds Cobham Bowers, as well as views of the serene central courtyard and flint-walled garden.

The layout of the project is conceived as a series of interconnected communities, promoting neighbourliness and a sense of belonging. Each floor effectively becomes its own neighbourhood, with a more intimate grouping of four apartments, fostering interactions and a strong sense of community among residents.

Another key element within the standard layouts is the incorporation of adaptable spaces and transitional living. Recognising that residents' needs may change over time, the homes at Cobham Bowers are designed with versatility at their core. Spaces initially designated as studies or home offices can be easily transformed into bedrooms, providing flexibility that allows residents to adapt their living spaces without the need for major renovations. Additional space for carers is another essential aspect of the project's design, acknowledging the possibility that some residents may require support as they age. By integrating extra space within the flats, Cobham Bowers ensures that care can be provided seamlessly while maintaining the dignity and independence of residents.

Balconies, while simple in concept, reveal intricacies in detail upon closer inspection. Pitched roofs and chimneys are crafted to symbolise 'home', adding to a stimulating roofline that captures the essence of domestic warmth and familiarity.

Sustainability is a fundamental guiding principle for the project, influencing its design and operation. Cobham Bowers is developed with a vision for a sustainable future, embodying the ethos of long life, low energy consumption and reduced maintenance. A lightweight inner-leaf insulation

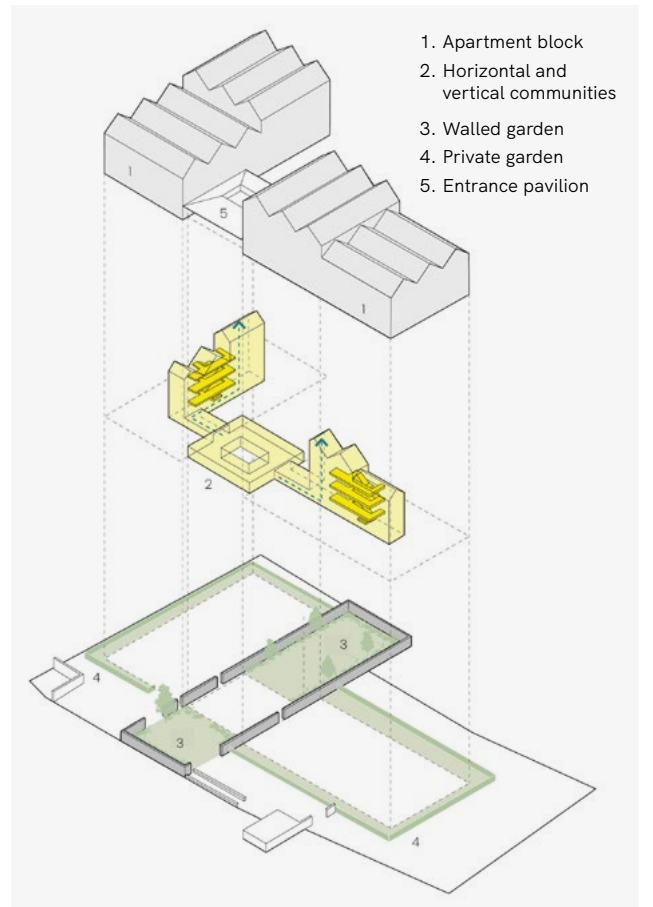
is employed to maximise thermal efficiency within the wall thickness, resulting in a consistently comfortable living space for residents and reduced energy costs.

The project also prioritises reducing ongoing maintenance and service charges. This is achieved through the implementation of repeated details and layouts, as well as a focus on standardisation. Despite comprising 53 homes, the project offers only four home types, demonstrating how complexity can be managed through thoughtful design concepts. This approach not only helps reduce initial construction costs but also simplifies future repairs, making it more efficient and cost-effective.

## 'Cobham Bowers is developed with a vision for a sustainable future'

Materially, the project features the use of local flint, a material that holds historical significance and resonates with the local context, creating a sense of homeliness and belonging. This choice reflects a commitment to a responsive and contextually aware design approach. Additionally, the preference for light-coloured brick helps mitigate heat island effects, contributing to broader sustainability objectives. These materials, set against the landscape, create dynamic shadows and contrasts that energise the living spaces and gardens.

The result of a thoughtful combination of these elements has resulted in a homely environment for later living that is aesthetically pleasing, sustainable and deeply rooted in a sense of place and community.



Cutaway showing the communities and their relationships to the gardens



Bird's-eye view showing Cobham Bowers context, layout and light-coloured brick









‘A new energy to retirement living’ — the interior design aids sight, mobility, senses and confidence



‘Designing for the over-65s demographic never needs to result in a compromise on beautiful design or architectural aesthetics’



#### THE INTERIOR DESIGNERS' ACCOUNT

**Jo Love**

Group director, Love Interiors

The collaboration between architecture and interior design at Cobham Bowers brings a new energy to retirement living.

The elements to consider when designing for the over-65s demographic never need to result in a compromise on beautiful design or architectural aesthetics. Experience, travel, literature, music, health, art and the appreciation of all life has to offer are reflected in every detail of this incredible place. As one's needs and requirements perhaps change with time, one's value placed on quality, thoughtfulness and beautiful design increases.

Design details that inconspicuously aid sight, mobility, senses and confidence are woven throughout. Contrast borders in flooring, separating defined zones and key entrances, unconsciously guide you from space to space. Natural, richer woods meet softer, paler woven carpet. Wall colours and textures change throughout the internal areas to assist with vision and orientation. Tile, brick, painted timber and painted plaster are accented by bold artwork at key scenes. Lighting situated at all levels is curated and designed with practicality yet purpose, from high-level feature lighting

to beautiful wall lights for wayfinding and task lighting for reading. Door handles that look and feel beautiful but move easily and joinery with push-open doors and drawers allow any hands to use them with ease. Floor-to-ceiling windows and doors allow the greatest amount of natural daylight to awaken senses yet can be softly diffused with sheer gliding panels.

When furnishing the communal spaces, an unwavering refusal to use ‘retirement/elderly’ furniture held strong. Instead, bespoke-designed pieces nestle alongside beautiful designer furniture, some of which has been discreetly adapted to specific heights to increase comfort and usability.



Rooms include contrast borders in flooring to help guide residents from space to space





The use of flint in the building and walled garden was inspired by the local vernacular



#### THE LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT'S ACCOUNT

**Mark Johnson**

Founding director, UBU Design

As the changing face of our towns and cities develops to become less car-centric and more pedestrian-oriented, we had the opportunity to play a little part in this evolution in Cobham.

On Portsmouth Road in the Surrey village, the location for Lifestory's new retirement development originally held an office building tucked away behind another office building, with residential buildings and a park encircling the site. In our work, we have found that retirement schemes generally

have a similar MO: they are located near local shops and amenities to enable residents to stay independent and walk to these facilities. To unlock the space and open it up to the surrounding area, therefore, we knew we had to focus on creating entrance landscaping that would be both welcoming and practical.

We thoughtfully set out our designs to be physically (layout, space planning), functionally (access, bins, entrance) and aesthetically (colour, texture) intentional, ensuring an elevation that draws people in from Portsmouth Road and on to the site, and, conversely, guides residents into the village beyond. It was important that it did not feel as though you still were entering or exiting an office development. This was achieved through a crisp architectural design reflected in the boundary treatment, which cleverly wrapped into a bin store and was punctuated by a complementary and contemporary gate.

Direct access into Cobham Bowers helps with wayfinding from outside the site, and once inside the boundary wall the main entrance announces itself with the primary access to the building and into the lobby. The parking area is deliberately functional to help to draw people into the main entrance and lobby as well.

The lobby and lounge area leads through the building to the rear residents' garden. This formal walled garden was inspired by the walled garden within Painshill Park, a stone's throw from the site, which is the finest remaining example of an 18th-century English landscape park, designed by Charles Hamilton between 1738 and 1773.

The use of flint in the building and walled garden was again inspired by the local vernacular, with the flint continuing through the building's ground floor into the walls of the walled garden, creating a unifying element and tying architecture to landscape. The garden is laid out in a formal lawn, for residents to use for croquet and other communal lawn sports. A path network allows residents to meander around the garden, with seating designed to enhance the feeling of formality while allowing for points of rest and social interaction. The planting in the walled garden has a degree of formality, with lavender hedges, as well as borders of shrubs and herbaceous planting helping to soften the space as well as providing colour, scent and contrast.



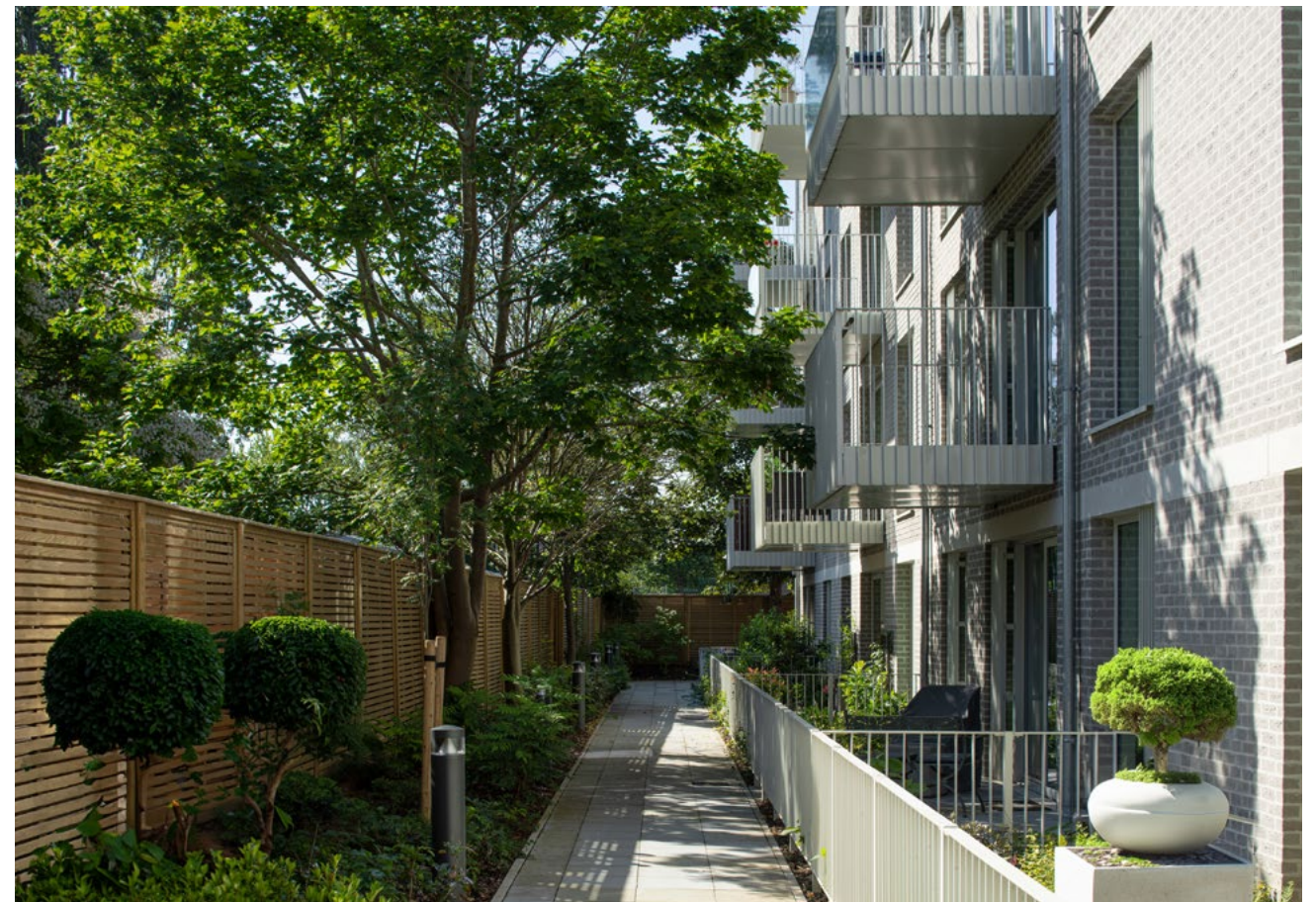
The landscaping principles employed focus on the welcoming and the practical

From the end of the walled garden, residents can walk east or west along the front of individual resident's gardens.

Each garden has been well planted with a broad variety of plant species providing year-round interest. The garden spaces are bounded by a low open fence of the same design as the entrance gate, enabling easy social interaction between residents as they traverse the site. This connection provided a circular route around the building, offering the homeowners an informal walk for passive exercise.

## 'Cobham Bowers achieves the aspiration of contemporary living within a tranquil setting'

Cobham Bowers achieves the aspiration of contemporary living within a tranquil setting. Residents are encouraged to spend time outside both on the grounds, through passive activity such as walking, social interaction or more considered informal sports, as well as in the village, with welcoming routes to and from the main entrance—all of which are key to a fulfilling life in later life. ●



Phil Coffey

Garden spaces are bounded by a low open fence of the same design as the entrance gate, enabling easy social interaction between residents



# A PLACE OF HOPE

We take a look at the John Morden Centre:  
a place of hope during a social care crisis

Architect: **Mæ**  
Structural engineer: **MHA Structural Design**  
Landscape architect: **J&L Gibbons**





## THE ARCHITECT'S ACCOUNT

Alex Ely

Founding director, Mæ

Our commission to design the John Morden Centre, which won RIBA's Stirling Prize 2023, came at a time when, according to the Care Quality Commission report, England's health and social care system was 'gridlocked' and there was a 'tsunami of unmet care' that continues to this day. The daycare centre houses health and social facilities and shines a spotlight on the potential for architecture to uplift the human spirit and help residents thrive in their older years.

### Tackling social isolation

Morden College has been at the forefront of enriching older people's lives for more than 300 years. Today, the charity's core purpose is to provide older people in financial hardship with a home for life, to support them as they grow older, and to provide care services, including residential nursing care, if the need arises. Morden College is a strong community, committed to enabling the older people they support to have the highest quality of life, for the rest of their lives.

The John Morden Centre is designed to be a hub for beneficiaries' social activities and health and wellbeing needs. It is home to Café 19, Merchant's Hall (a theatre space), resident arts and crafts facilities and a health centre. The hub aims to tackle social isolation and loneliness among older people, creating a friendly and convivial space for them to thrive, with support and companionship.

Age UK in its report *The State of Health and Care of Older People in England 2023* stated that among our older population: 'Many lack the social care they need, and/or end up in hospital when this might have been avoided.' It also notes: 'The crisis in the NHS therefore ultimately reflects our failure to care as effectively as we could and should for our growing older population.' We see the John Morden Centre as a model that could be find a wider application in the health and social care sector.

### A building that ties old and new

Morden College is a grade I-listed almshouse in Blackheath, London founded in 1695 by Sir John Morden and built by Sir Christopher Wren's master builder and successor, Edward Strong.

The new building makes reference to the historic architecture in its colonnade, roofscape and brickwork. Its generous social spaces are linked by a meandering colonnade, which forms a spine of circulation and opens up connections to the mature landscaped gardens which characterise the site.

It sensitively engages with the existing context in a familiar architectural language, delivered using modern methods of construction to provide a high-quality, long-lasting and sustainable facility for the next 100 years of the college's work. The John Morden Hall has been retained, integrated and refurbished as part of the project.

A cloister, like an avenue of trees, runs through the building, off which a series of generous tent-like pavilions hang, accommodating the functional and communal spaces. The cloister—wide enough for two passing wheelchairs with seats for resting on your journey—facilitates a happy and surprising journey along a winding path past carefully curated pockets, niches, courtyard gardens and spatially delightful rooms. Visitors are always aware of nature, with generous views over gardens and a large cedar tree that sits at the centre of the building. The positive feedback I get from residents every time I visit reassures me that it is a project that delivers on its purpose to create a building that uplifts the spirit for the long term and helps residents thrive.



Care in the community — the John Morden Centre's Blackheath site in context



RIBA president **Muyiwa Oki**, said: 'Loneliness and isolation are critical issues, particularly for older people. The John Morden Centre's elegance and efficacy set a high standard for spaces that support healthier, happier and more independent lives. It illustrates the positive potential of architecture to strengthen vibrant and active communities. This is a skilfully designed package that minimises the building's impact on our planet's delicate ecology, while also harnessing the therapeutic value of the surrounding nature. It stands as a testament to the vision and ambition of Morden College, Mæ's creativity — and the exemplary collaboration between them.'

RIBA Stirling Prize jury chair, **Ellen van Loon**, said: 'The John Morden Centre is a place of joy and inspiration. It sensitively and seamlessly integrates medical facilities and social spaces, delivering a bold and hopeful model for the design of health and care centres for the elderly. Creating an environment that lifts the spirits and fosters community is evident at every turn and in every detail. This building provides comfort and warmth, with thoughtful features designed to prevent isolation. It illustrates how buildings can themselves be therapeutic — supporting care and instilling a sense of belonging. Great architecture orients people so they can thrive, and this building is exemplary at achieving exactly that.'





Brick external facing suits the listed building setting

**THE STRUCTURAL ENGINEER'S ACCOUNT****Michael Hayes**

Director, MHA Structural Design

MHA Structural Design was delighted to be asked by Mæ Architects to join its limited competition-winning team.

Mæ Architects' sensitive and insightful approach to the listed building, set in a rather remote part of the overall John Morden College site, and its desire to deliver a welcoming and uplifting building in response to the brief provided a number of interesting structural engineering opportunities and challenges, despite the structure being single storey. Sustainability and reducing carbon emissions are two of the key challenges facing the construction industry. This building addresses these topics in a number of different ways, including the use of mass timber to sequester CO<sub>2</sub>, retention and refurbishment rather than demolition of John Morden Hall, adoption of cement replacement products for reinforced concrete elements and the use of lime mortar to enable the bricks used to clad the building to be more easily cleaned and reused at the end of the building's life.

Wood was selected for sustainability reasons and because of the recognised health benefits of using a natural material. Of all the various engineered wood products available, cross-laminated timber (CLT) was chosen for its breathability, factory tolerances, speed of erection and ability to support the brick external facing chosen by Mæ Architects to suit the listed building setting. It is also a modern method of construction, accruing the associated efficiencies and H&S benefits.

Being made from untreated softwood, CLT is prone to rot if the wood gets too wet. The edges of the panels therefore need to be sealed while exposed during construction, and the upper faces protected by a film such as Siga Wetguard until the permanent weathering is added. The Structural Timber Association has produced a moisture management strategy document for guidance.

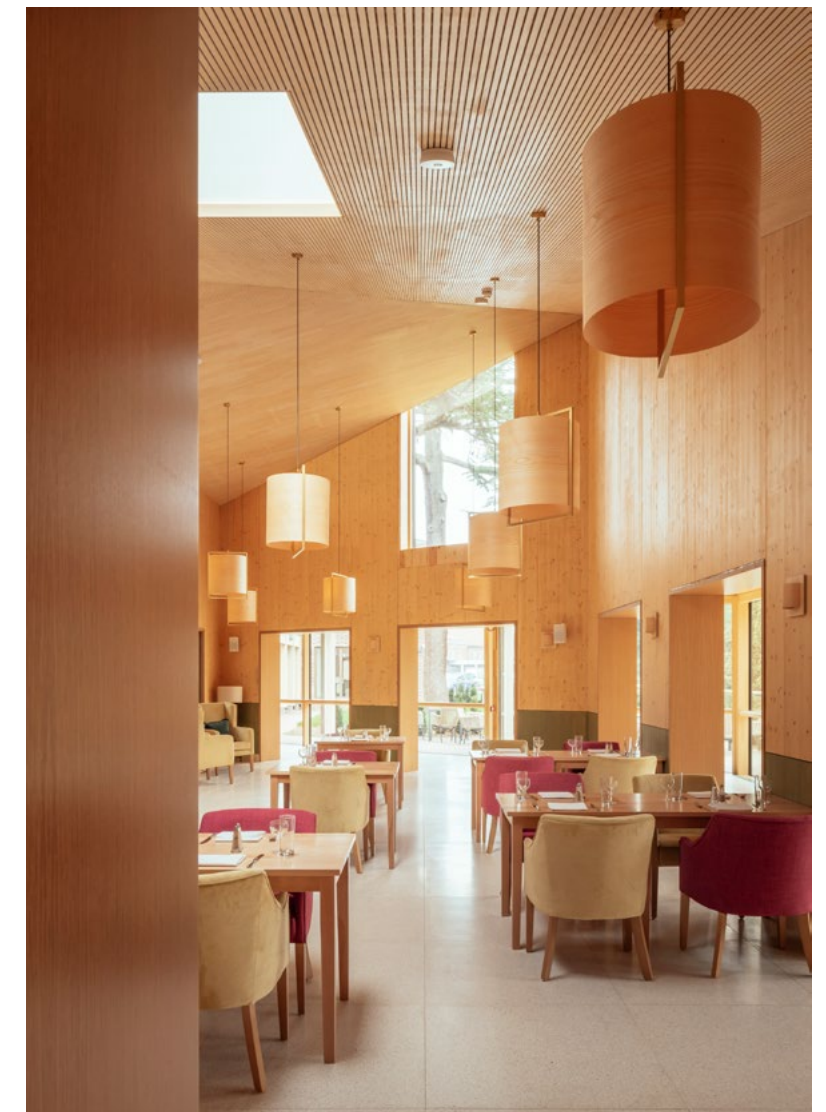
Externally, the timber columns of the colonnade are constructed using Accoya, the brand name of a very durable acetylated softwood product, with the base of the columns raised out of the splash zone using cruciform stainless-steel plates.

A structural movement joint divides the building approximately in two. Stability of the building is provided by the CLT, mobilising the kentledge of the ground-floor slab and the foundations. Panels of CLT have a maximum width of 3m, for transportation purposes, and the openings into the Bakers dozen generally work within this constraint.

Geologically, the site sits in the Harwich Formation, a soil type comprising silt or silty or sandy clays. Fortunately, given the desire

to keep the existing large cedar trees, the site investigation encountered a silty, sandy, flint gravel, with little shrinkable fraction, below a relatively shallow layer of made ground. The foundations of the building are therefore taken into this flint gravel, poured monolithically with the slab to provide both a flat surface for the CLT frame fixing and the kentledge for stability. Polystyrene was added to the sides of the foundations to try to limit the effects of thermal and shrinkage forces on the slab. Fifty-per-cent European-sourced GGBS was also used in the concrete mix, which helps control the heat of hydration and reduce the embodied carbon. The made ground and various existing foundations and drainage runs were grubbed out and replaced with engineered fill to provide a sound bearing beneath the slab and allow for erection of the CLT frame by a spider crane traversing the slab.

We very much enjoyed working collaboratively and creatively as a proactive member of the strong design team to deliver this sensitively detailed building.



Wood was used extensively for sustainability and health reasons









### THE LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT'S ACCOUNT

Neil Davidson

Partner, J&L Gibbons

Following a collaborative design process, the landscape and architectural proposals combined to sensitively engage with the built and living heritage of the college, notably the character of the grade I-listed almshouse courtyards and the setting provided by the magnificent mature trees. By working with what otherwise might be considered insurmountable constraints, the designs maximised the potential of the long narrow site, seamlessly integrating new buildings and ‘garden

rooms’ alongside listed structures, existing trees, an existing memorial orchard and meadow, and essential functional requirements of the college such as emergency access for ambulances.

A forensic understanding of the root protection areas of the existing trees, particularly the large cedar of Lebanon, was required to be able to carefully accommodate the new buildings. Working closely with arboricultural consultant CBA Trees we were able to understand what was possible and to develop methodologies to inform the building footprint and construction process, ensuring the trees were protected throughout and could be enjoyed for generations to come.



Outside, in — ‘garden rooms’ were integrated alongside listed structures and existing trees, memorial orchard and meadow



Al fresco — a dining terrace next to the café is sheltered by thick yew hedges

Due to the outlying location of the John Morden Centre, it needed to have a legible arrival sequence from the outset, with a clearly defined pedestrian focus and accessible routes throughout. The journey through the building starts with a familiar garden wall embellished with subtle brick details and offers glimpses into the courtyard with a specimen tree and seating beyond, which denotes the start of the cloister. The medical centre office at the corner provides safety and surveillance as the elderly residents approach the building. The entrance space was designed to be generous, with views from other parts of the college and through to the garden beyond.

The courtyard garden provides an external space that sits alongside and adjacent to the cloister. It provides a quiet area with informal seating for meeting friends, an outdoor space to wait for an appointment, and a place to enjoy the quiet setting and catch the morning sun.

Aligning with the ethos of the building, the other landscape spaces were designed to be convivial, where residents and visitors can meet, learn and socialise. The cloister adopts a similar architectural language to the original almshouse courtyards, providing uninterrupted circulation between the pavilions and a warm and protected space to enjoy the garden during the winter months.

The large garden space to the south is divided into smaller ‘garden rooms’ complementing the internal

functions and providing a verdant outlook from the cloister. A dining terrace next to the café is sheltered by thick yew hedges. The welcome feeling of the ‘snug’ is reinforced by the containment of herbaceous planting and yew hedges. A larger space for relaxation sits below the lofty canopy of a cedar tree, catching the afternoon sun. The understorey boundary was enriched with native woodland species with seasonal interest.

**‘The landscape spaces were designed to be convivial, where residents and visitors can meet, learn and socialise’**

Existing hardstanding was replaced with permeable clay pavers, allowing water to gradually replenish the water table. Rain gardens and green roofs help attenuate water and enhance biodiversity. ●



# BACK TO WORK

By *Adrian Boyce*, co-managing director, London, Avison Young UK



A new year, a new outlook on the office and property market? Let's see.

You could be forgiven for entering 2024 with a sense of hope more than expectation that the economy and in turn the property sector will see a return to growth. Recent data from the Office

for National Statistics released just before Christmas reveals a contraction of -0.1 per cent in GDP for Q3 and an adjusted flatline for Q2. Let's delve into the evolving dynamics of how occupiers have settled into hybrid working and the implications of their choices.

Total office take-up in Central London for Q4 2023 reached 3.2 million sq ft, surpassing the 10-year quarterly average by 29 per cent. The vacancy rate stands at 7.9 per cent, just 0.1 percentage points below last quarter. New deals in the financial services sector dominated, accounting for 44.3 per cent of the take-up, with TMT at 10.0 per cent and business services at 9.2 per cent. The City played a significant role, representing 56 per cent of activity during this quarter, with a noteworthy leasing of 4.6 million sq ft over the past 12 months (source: Avison Young).

TfL data also continues to support the trend of more people returning to London offices. In 2023, passenger journeys increased by 7 per cent, reaching 89 per cent of pre-pandemic levels. Interestingly, DLR recovery lags slightly at only 80 per cent of pre-pandemic levels.

Hybrid working is now fully accepted by most businesses, making square footage take-up only one metric. The balance between employees' desire for flexibility and employers' emphasis on business performance is more tense than at any time since the pandemic.

Key players in the financial sector—including Bank of America, CitiGroup, Lloyds and HSBC—have unequivocally stated that employment implies physical presence in the office. Clifford Chance and EY are intensifying their monitoring of employees for adherence to hybrid working guidelines (source: *The Financial Times*). In 2024, we anticipate both tubes and offices becoming busier places. The latest announcement by London mayor Sadiq Khan about introducing blanket off-peak TfL fares on Fridays to encourage people back onto public transport might also have implications on office footfall.

The trend of major companies relocating their headquarters to central London continues to grow. Diageo moved from west London to the West End in 2022, HSBC is returning to the City, and GSK announced in

2022 its plans to move to a new headquarters in central London this year from its current location in Brentford, West London. This shift reflects a vote of confidence in the importance of location for staff. Expect more such moves as employers seek the optimal space for fostering collaboration and expertise among their combined workforce in a shared office.

How has this affected the availability of space? The vacancy rate declined ever so slightly to 7.9 per cent in Q4 2023 (from 8.0 per cent in the previous quarter). But supply is also constrained, particularly in the West End (3.7 per cent), while in the City the rate is 9.7 per cent in Q4 2023, compared with 10.4 per cent in Q3 (source: Avison Young).

London has consistently claimed the top spot in global financial services rankings, a trend that endured through the challenges of Brexit and the COVID pandemic, generally trading the number one place with New York (depending on where you get your rankings from—New York or London). In terms of tech, the Z/Yen Group Smart Centres Index, now in its eighth year, once again acknowledged London as the world's hub, with the strongest talent and the highest financial resources—beating New York, of course. Coupled with a vast international reputation, this achievement is endorsed by over 100 tech companies with a valuation exceeding \$1 billion being based in London. More than 60 of those companies call London home.

## 'In 2024, we anticipate both tubes and offices becoming busier places'

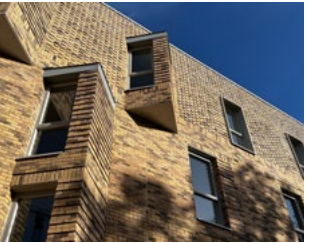
In 2024, it appears that the financial services sector will remain the primary driver for the commercial property market. The tech sector will have a less dominant role due to successful hybrid work integration. However, it's likely to keep reshaping the workplace, as it often sets trends in workplace innovation.

This expectation considers not only the office space requirements but also the ancillary needs of these sectors, such as data centres and a demand for young talent from universities. The increased level of office attendance and demand for leisure and F&B offering, especially in the financial sector, further support this outlook. ●

# PROJECT DIRECTORY

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# BRIGHT LIGHTS, BIG CITY

Jon Eaglesham, MD of Barr Gazetas, on the delights of the West End



I arrived in London 23 years ago, after successfully getting a job at Barr Gazetas, where I’ve had the fortune to work since and see London operating in all modes—the good, the bad and the ugly.

Before that, I had only visited three times, and all were very different experiences.

When I was 10, I visited the awe-inspiring Natural History Museum on a school trip, filled with excitement for the grand and historic architecture and the mystery of dinosaurs. I then returned as a teenager in the 1990s, driving four friends up to party in a Brixton warehouse—I got my first encounter with the gritty, rebellious, chaotic, and free version of London. My final visit before the big move was in 2001. Dinner and a show with my parents after completing my degree. London was full of possibilities, and I was hooked...

Not growing up in London, you could say I was a little naïve about the opportunities it presented. I had to learn to balance urge and excitement with a grown-up job. Some might say (including me) that I am still balancing this, but I do it carefully and with compassion. Someone told me recently, during a healing retreat, that everything bad is good, and everything good is good. The journey is far more important than the destination.

Having lived in London for a while now, I can confidently say that my London is very varied. My delight, every day, is walking around its streets, seeing the fabric that creates it and the open spaces that reveal it.

Barr Gazetas has always been based centrally with a W1 postcode, and this is not by chance. We love being in the thick of it—and have been lucky to have worked on projects all over the city, while carving a particular niche for ourselves in our own neighbourhood.

The West End’s transformation has been incredible over the 20 years I have walked its streets. The gentle move away from cars to foot, especially on Regent Street, has had a hugely positive impact. I’m excited to see what the Crown Estate and Westminster City Council do next to permanently prioritise people. Recent years have seen us work on projects including the restoration of Quadrant Arcade, Regent Street’s only arcade, the delivery of the new galleries at the Royal Academy and the reimagining of a whole city block in Covent Garden to create Grainhouse for developer Hines. We are also reimagining two prominent streets and retrofitting a double-fronted Fitzrovia plot with a super sustainable workplace. All these projects are like my London—all about the journey. That’s where our designs originate from—imagining the future user experience and modifying it, taking into account the fabric, the openness and all the different factors and making it better.

I love that my role is being part of the area’s transformation and ever-changing culture. We are fortunate that some of the world’s best buildings are here in the West End, whether historic, reimagined or new. It’s a privilege to be among the exceptional huddle of architects leading that change.

The opportunities are plentiful too. Once you find the story or narrative that allows your design or ideas to be trusted, they will be, and your project will be built. Even though the process can be challenging at times, our practice’s collaborative approach has earned us a track record of complex projects approved by planning which deliver successfully both for our clients and the community they sit within. This transformation is My London, and every day I see something new, something evolving.

I’m sure I will continue to be involved in the transformation of ever-changing London and hope that we contribute to making it as exciting, welcoming and memorable as it was for me all those years back. London’s ability to change is its magnificence. ●



Four star project — the Quadrant Arcade on Regent Street

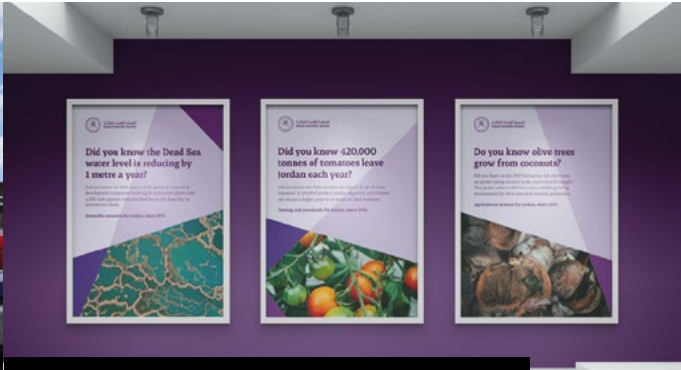
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