

# NLQ

NEW LONDON QUARTERLY  
ISSUE 63 | Q3 2025 | £10

nla

## A LEGACY FOR LONDON

LLDC's Shazia Hussain and V&A's Tim Reeve | Metropolitan Workshop | Buckley Gray Yeoman | Expedition Engineering | Dock Shed Canada Water



# NLA AWARDS 2025

Thursday 20 November 2025  
Guildhall, City of London

Join over 600 of the capital's leading decision-makers and professionals across development, design, planning and construction to hear the announcement of the winners of the prestigious NLA Awards and Special Prize winner announcements, including the NLA Londoner of the Year and Mayor's Prize presentation.



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NLA Awards Lunch 2025



Jason Hawkes



Twenty years ago, NLA threw an opening party on Store Street, just a day after the President of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) Jacques Rogge announced London as the Host City for the Games of the XXX Olympiad in 2012. So today, as part of NLA's celebrations of two decades of making the city a better place, it is an opportune moment to take stock of, and celebrate, the advances both it and the city have made in that time.

In this issue we take a comprehensive look at the ongoing legacy project that sprang from the London Olympics 2012. There's an interview with Shazia Hussain, who has taken her background in the wider area to channel it into her new job as chief executive of the London Legacy Development Corporation. In the same piece we talk to Tim Reeve, whose V&A will be such a large part of the cultural regeneration that is East Bank, and is already at the well-received V&A Storehouse project over at Here East.

Elsewhere in this special feature on Newham, I catch up with Metropolitan Workshop, who are key players in the borough and beyond, as they celebrate 20 years in the game, with collaboration and extensive, fruitful consultation at the heart of all that they do, including in the crucial and at one time controversial Carpenters' Estate.

Jobs and skills will be a big part of the wider East London's continuing renewal, and we have a Skills Special this issue, too, to build on the research NLA put together on this key aspect of London's future built environment sector. Columnist Yolande Barnes takes a look at this important issue, and there

is an opinion piece from Regal—whose training scheme for former military services personnel is exemplary—along with a viewpoint garnering opinion on the importance of skills to all.

As the London Festival of Architecture gets into full swing this month, Eliza Grosvenor writes about the 'Voices' theme, while Jace Tyrrell pens another note about how Opportunity London is making waves for the city at events like UKREiiF and beyond.

We take a look at Buckley Gray Yeoman's continued rise, including its decision to run an unusual offshoot—the Shoreditch Arts Club—while Raluca Racasan talks to Expedition's Chris Wise and looks at the Pavgen technology in her tech feature.

There is plenty more besides—including two building reviews, the first looking at British Land's Dock Shed project at Canada Water and the second at Maccreeor Lavington's distinctive, shutters-filled affordable housing project at White City. Arup's Sowmya Parthasarathy talks New Towns, We Made That's Holly Lewis provides an update on women's safety in the city and Dinah Bornat details what we can learn from Earls Court's consultations and masterplanning.

One last legacy: this is the final edition of NLQ in printed form. It's been a great (and award-winning) journey over the last 15 years, but it is now time to find new and exciting ways of reaching the NLA audience, evolving long-form editorial into printed research reports and much more online via the web, mixed-media formats and elsewhere.

Enjoy the issue, watch this space, and see you on the other side...

David Taylor, Editor

NLQ  
The magazine of NLA—  
London's built environment community



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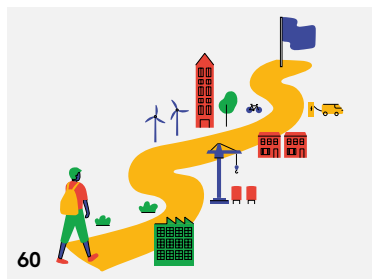
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5th Floor, 1 Gresham Street, London EC2V 7BX

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# NLQ 63



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Ruby Bergin/NLA; Joe Howard; Fiona Smallshaw; Brendan Bell



## London Real Estate Forum

The London Real Estate Forum will return to Guildhall this year under the theme of 'partnership'. We will delve into the question of what true and productive partnership in real estate means, and how it can underpin all our work throughout London and beyond.

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# THE QUARTER

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

**BUILDINGS**

Barr Gazetas completed the refurbishment of **127 Charing Cross Road** for Nomura and Lothbury Investment Management. Comprising over 46,000 sq ft (c. 4,275 sqm) of office and retail space, the renewal is a complete facade replacement and a three-storey extension that increases the GEA by 47 per cent. Newham Council unanimously approved Pollard Thomas Edwards’ **29-storey riverside development** for the Pickstock Group on Stratford High Street. The mixed-use build-to-rent scheme delivers 355 homes — 25 per cent affordable — alongside a Spacehub-designed public garden, linking Bow Back River to the high street. It also features a new café and performance venue. Marina Tabassum’s pavilion, **A Capsule in Time**, was unveiled to the public at Serpentine South on 3 June 2025, with Goldman Sachs supporting the annual project for the 11th consecutive year. SPPARC is set to return the West End’s grade II-listed **Saville Theatre** to its original use after more than half a century, following planning permission and listed building consent being granted by the London Borough of Camden. Designed on behalf of Yoo Capital, the SPPARC scheme will restore live performance to the Art Deco venue, while also introducing a new boutique hotel operated by Citizen M. The City of London approved plans for **Assemblies**, a co-living-led development designed by Morris+Company at 150 Minories to be delivered by residential developer HUB and Bridges Fund Management. Repurposing the existing structure of the building, the partnership will deliver 277 next-generation co-living homes, alongside extensive amenities and improved public realm with new pedestrian links. This office-to-residential conversion will be the second in the City by the partnership. Resolution Property successfully secured planning permission from the London Borough of Hounslow to convert the well-known **Vantage** office building in Brentford’s Golden Mile into a residential development. Under the approved plans, the 12-storey building in west London, spanning around 117,000 sq ft (c. 10,870 sqm) of office space, can be repurposed into 178 modern residential units. Common Projects, Mitheridge Capital Management and SGN Place have won permission to develop **Wandsworth Gasworks**. One of the last remaining undeveloped brownfield sites in Wandsworth’s town centre, it will be transformed into 620 new homes — 40 per cent of which are designated as affordable housing — as well as 4,250 sqm of workspace and 9,000 sqm of parks. The development has been masterplanned by architect ShedKM, with buildings designed by Carmody Groarke and MAX Architects. The public realm has been designed by BD Landscape Architects. The City of London approved AHMM’s redevelopment of **Lasdun’s Milton Gate**.

**COMPANIES**

**The Crown Estate** signed a development joint venture with **Lendlease** for six major schemes in London and Birmingham, including Euston Station in London and Smithfield Market in Birmingham. Design-and-build contractor **McAleer & Rushe** increased its turnover by 12.6 per cent in 2024 to £491 million, with pre-tax profits rising by 46 per cent to £16 million, supported by a growing pipeline of large-scale schemes across its UK operations. Notable projects secured in 2024 include a £225 million residential project at Bermondsey, a £110 million PBSA scheme at Crutched Friars, London, the £40 million Croke Park hotel in Dublin and a £80 million later-living scheme in Royal Tunbridge Wells.

**REPORTS, EVENTS AND COMPETITIONS**

Mayor Sadiq Khan announced that City Hall will actively explore releasing parts of London’s Green Belt to help end the housing crisis. The announcement came as he launched a consultation to help shape the next **London Plan**. ‘300 Homes within a Union Street Mile’, a proposal for a transformation of Plymouth’s Union Street by Clifton Emery Design, Nudge Community Builders, Millfields Trust, Plymouth Energy Community and Devon and Cornwall Planning Consultants, won this year’s **Davidson Prize**, worth £10,000. CIBSE launched its **‘Building for the Future’** campaign, a transformative initiative designed to build a lasting legacy for the building services engineering profession. This summer Sir John Soane’s Museum will present the UK’s first retrospective survey of Richard Rogers’s life and work since his death in 2021. **Richard Rogers: Talking Buildings** will be designed and curated by Richard’s son, Ab, and is accompanied by a specially commissioned installation by Rogers’s former practice, RHSP, showcasing its impact on global urban spaces.

**PEOPLE**

**Stuart Blower** joined Chybik + Kristof as director of its London office. Barr Gazetas appointed former Buckley Gray Yeoman director of strategy **Natalie Thomson** as its project director. **Rachel Garstang** joined London Square as head of communications after seven years at Grosvenor. DeSimone Consulting Engineering announced that award-winning structural engineer, **Dmitri Jajich**, joined the firm as a principal. Jajich joins DeSimone from KPM, where he served as global director of structures following a 24-year career with Skidmore, Owings and Merrill. Commercial property consultant t Hartnell Taylor Cook announced a round of senior promotions including **Jonathan Moore** and **Steven Shaw**, both promoted to director, and **Miranda Anglias**, promoted to senior associate director. Leading multi-disciplinary development consultancy, Pegasus Group, announced the appointment of **Bindu Pokkyarath** as economics director in its London office. White Arkitekter appointed **Christian Dimbleby** as its new UK head of sustainability. ●



Barr Gazetas’ 127 Charing Cross Road



Pollard Thomas Edwards’ Stratford High Street scheme



A Capsule in Time — Marina Tabassum’s Serpentine Pavilion



Play time — SPPARC’s Saville Theatre project



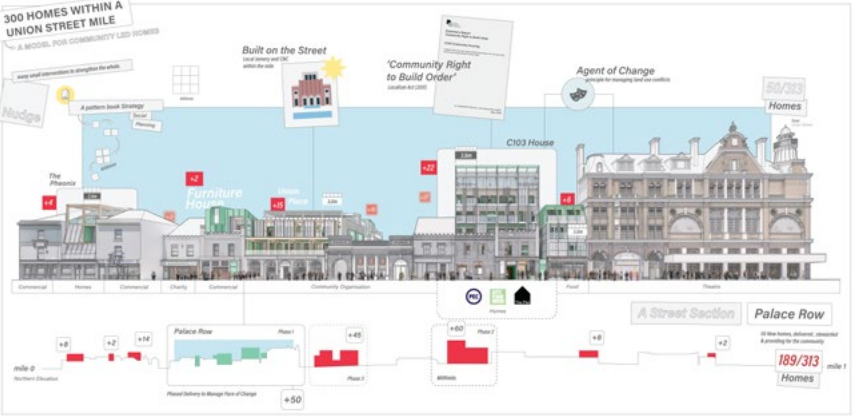
Morris+Company’s co-living-led Assemblies



620 new homes at Wandsworth Gasworks



McAleer & Rushe’s Crutched Friars scheme



‘300 Homes within a Union Street Mile’, winner of this year’s Davidson Prize



Richard Rogers: Talking Buildings





# PADDINGTON UNVEILS INTERNATIONAL ARTWORKS

Paddington Square has a new and colourful group of artworks for the 18-storey Renzo Piano Workshop-designed Cube building next to the station.

Thanks to the curation of the £2 million public art programme by Stella Ioannou at Lacuna Projects for the owner of Paddington Square, Great Western Developments, four distinct artworks surround the scheme, each with their own story to tell, by artists Ugo Rondinone, Pae White, Catherine Yass and Kathrin Böhm.

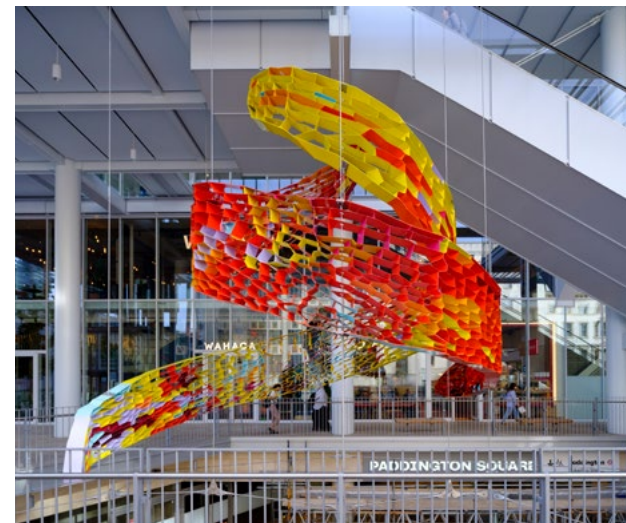
Facing the station, White's colourful *Somethinging* comprises 1,232 aluminium folded panels and some 20,000 folds, and, thanks to some clever engineering, appears to 'float' across levels of shops and restaurants. Developed during lockdown, as a full 360-degree experience suggestive of flight or a dragonfly's wings it lends animation to and connects the spaces.

Round the corner on Tanner Lane facing the St Mary's Hospital, Catherine Yass's *NHS Swimmers* is a 24m-long photograph which commemorates 10 NHS workers swimming underwater (plus bubbles). More than 200 images were overlaid on to blue negatives, and the image celebrates freedom of movement and the necessary breaks those nurses had to snatch from the pressure involved in working during peak COVID times.

Böhm's temporary piece on the corner of Praed Street asks why we care about art using slogans and statements, while perhaps the most impactful of the quartet is Swiss artist Rondinone's yellow orange hermit—a 5m-tall focal point for the area again (as with much of his work) drawing on natural stone and inviting reflections on the inner self and natural world.

'It's worth noting that to be able to deliver such an integrated programme,' said Iannou, 'the public art absolutely needs to be part of the conversation and build programme from planning, ideally, or early construction stage at the latest.'

A jury of leading experts helped select the artists, including: WJames Sellar, CEO of Sellar; Stephen Feeke PhD, art advisor at Great Western Developments; Joost Moolhuijzen, director at Renzo Piano Building Workshop; Eleanor Pinfield, curator for Art on the Underground/TfL; Andrea Schlieker, director of exhibitions and displays at Tate Britain; Edwin Heathcote, architecture and design critic for *The Financial Times*; Scott Murdoch, founding partner at CWM; Lucy Zacaria, head of arts at Imperial Health Charity and curator at St Mary's Hospital; Shumi Bose, senior lecturer, architecture, at St Martins and curator at the RIBA; Elvira Dyangani Ose, director at The Showroom; Kay Buxton, chief executive of Paddington Partnership; and John Zamit, chairman of SEBRA. ●



Pae White's 'Somethinging'



Nick Turpin

Ugo Rondinone's five-metre-high 'yellow orange hermit' sculpture



Catherine Yass's 24m long collaborative photographic installation



Kathrin Böhm's The Showroom



# NLA AT 20

NLA chief executive *Nick McKeogh* looks back over 20 years of the organisation and forward into a new era of shaping better cities



There is something about a round-number birthday or anniversary that sparks reflection and renewal in us. A chance to cast off bad habits, perhaps, and set new goals and ambition for the years ahead.

That was certainly the mood amongst the team at the NLA as we entered

2025 and looked forward to how we might celebrate our 20th anniversary in July.

As we reflected on all that we have achieved since Peter Murray and I created the first place that the London built environment industry could come together across public and private sectors, we felt that we had much to be proud of, and yet so much more to achieve.

It has certainly been a long and eventful journey since we opened the doors of our first exhibition *The Changing Face of London* at The Building Centre on 7 July 2005—the fateful day after London won the bid to host the 2012 Olympic & Paralympic Games and four bombs went off in central London in the largest-ever co-ordinated terrorist attack on our city.

We also realised, to our surprise, that no less than a quarter of our history had taken place post-COVID. Those five years have been some of the most challenging yet exciting times for our business as we coped with little or no in-person events for almost two years, moved home to the Guildhall in the City of London, developed the New London Agenda as a guiding light for our work, and launched Opportunity London in partnership with London & Partners.

We were also mindful that our programme and communications channels had grown arms and legs over the years as the industry and our membership grew, that organisations reached out to us from all over the world to collaborate and draw on our skills, that there was no body driving capital investment into London, and that schools and colleges wanted us to help find pathways into employment.

All this had become increasingly difficult for the team to manage to the highest standards, and moreover quite difficult for our membership and audiences to keep up with, let alone engage with!

So, we set about the task of trying to understand where we deliver most value to the members that we serve, how we help them improve the quality of people’s lives, and what resources and skills we will need as an organisation to achieve this.

And we came to realise that our superpower lay in convening and connecting our unique community of some 30,000 built environment professionals in London and across the world—giving them the space to communicate their ideas to one another and the communities that they serve.

Where we become limited is when we choose to try and ‘do’ too much ourselves. So going forwards we must focus our efforts on creating the highest quality platforms that allow our community and partners to lead the conversation, build meaningful relationships and develop and evolve their skills.

Where the NLA has a distinct role—quite apart from any other organisation—is as a champion for the entire built environment sector in London: the city-makers across the public and private sectors who plan, design, engineer, develop, finance, build, maintain and manage the built world in London but also increasingly influence and impact the urbanisation and decarbonisation of cities across the globe.

## ‘At the heart of all we do: together, we shape better cities’

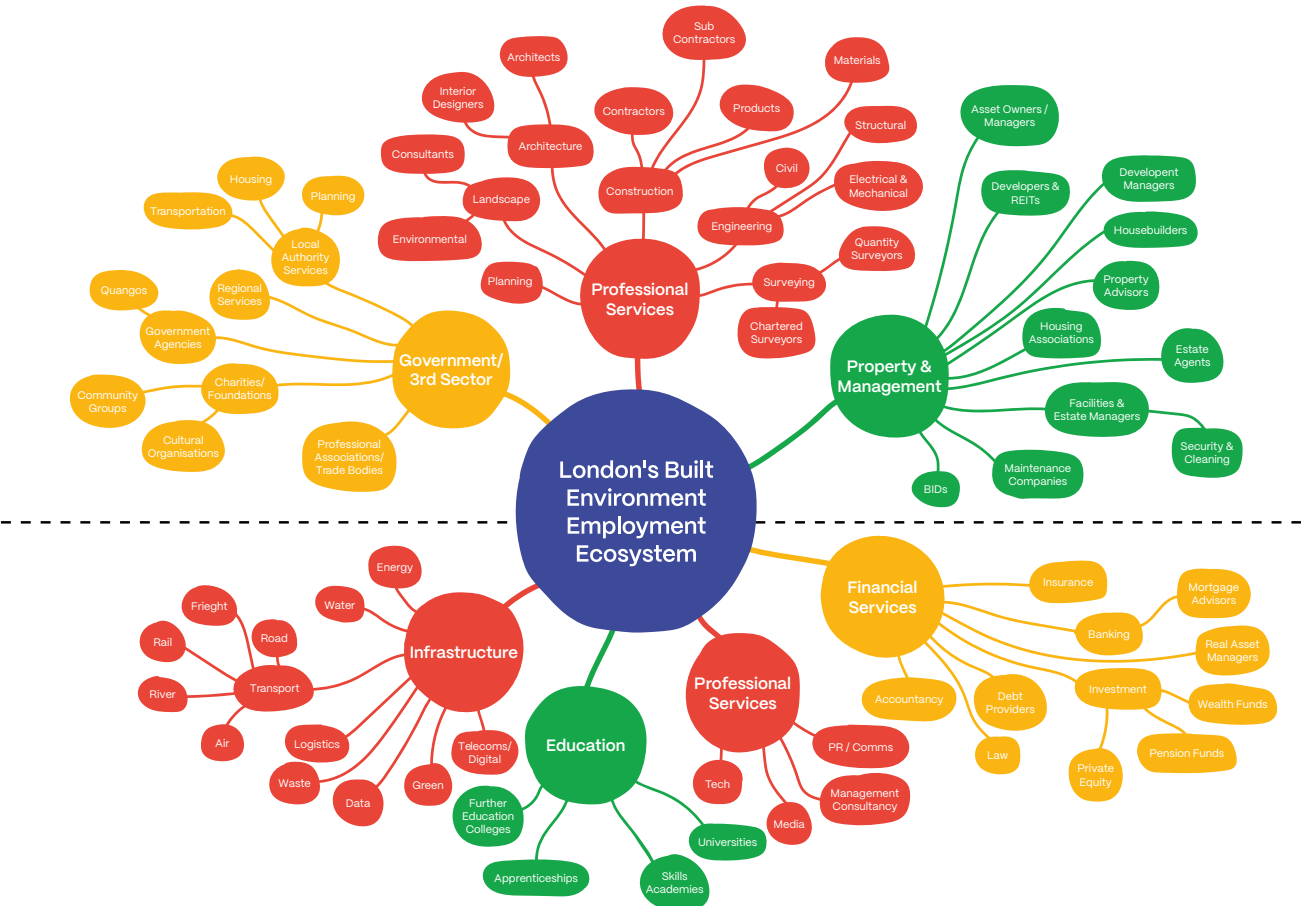
This super-sector employs 1 in 10 people in London, generates over 20 per cent of the total GVA of the London economy, and is set to grow rapidly over the coming decades as we build and retrofit the infrastructure, homes, workplaces, schools, colleges, universities, shops, museums, entertainment venues, civic buildings, public spaces and waterways in London, the UK and across the world that we need to survive and thrive.

It’s a message we will take to government to influence policy and priorities. It’s a message that we will take to cities and international investors. It’s a message that we will centre within the professionals and students in our membership. But perhaps most importantly it’s a message that we will take to Londoners to encourage them to get engaged in the conversation about the future of this great city, and, if possible, to inspire them to consider joining us as a future city-maker.

As we look towards to the next 20 years of the NLA, we will ensure that we place our central belief at the heart of all we do: together, we shape better cities. ●



The NLA team pictured at last year’s NLA Awards lunch



Joe Howard; NLA

Capital connections—the built environment network





# CLUB CLASS

Buckley Gray Yeoman has grown in the last eight years, not just in terms of its work and offices but also as owner of its own sideline, the Shoreditch Arts Club. *David Taylor* catches up with the practice



It is eight years since I last sat down with Buckley Gray Yeoman in Shoreditch House, the bustling club that serves a mean flat white, and more, to the creative types of Hipster East London. And now the practice has its own club, the Shoreditch Arts Club, a sideline next door that serves as a hireable venue, art-procuring business and place for its staff to eat, drink or entertain.

‘We really wanted it to be outward focused to the community,’ says founding director Matt Yeoman of the stylish venue. ‘Okay, albeit the art community, but that was a real driver. A place for everybody, not just another part of our office.’

The last time we talked, says Yeoman, BGY was talking about diversifying as a practice. ‘And that’s certainly come true in terms of Europe, where we now have a permanent office in Madrid.’ True, too of expansion in Bristol, the firm’s office there now at 15 people and about to expand again to 20, not least off the back of a big project win. It is doing more work in places like Birmingham and Cambridge too, and has ‘real momentum’ in the residential side, as well as more and bigger masterplanning jobs in places like Welwyn Garden City.

Last year, says Yeoman, was challenging for the profession but now conditions seem to have levelled out, and Welwyn’s mix of BTR, houses, a hotel and more on the site of a former Shredded Wheat factory is testament to that. Others are the work BGY is doing at the Truman Brewery as masterplanner and architect of one building, alongside other firms like Morris+Company; a £350 million consented scheme in Greenwich at Enderby Wharf; and a whole chunk

of Fish Island with housing and, like Truman, the retention of warehouses and commercial space. Plus, a project at Dalston Station, a mixture of affordable and private housing that has just gone in for planning.

‘That has been a really good change for us,’ says Yeoman. ‘We’re still doing a huge amount of retrofit and refurb, those kinds of projects that we’re always perhaps known for, but the masterplanning, the residential, the European stuff is definitely way more than we were doing. I think we’ve sort of matured into that size and scale of project.’

But there have been operational changes in the firm too, including the shift in 2019 to become an employee-owned

trust, ushering in a new board of directors including managing director Oliver Bayliss, and handling a little of the succession planning most firms need to put into place to secure their future working. It formally set up an interiors business five years ago, too, BGY ID, having ‘dabbled’ in interiors on bars, restaurants and hotel work. A standalone business, sometimes it works with the architectural practice, sometimes entirely



Art attack—the BGY-owned Shoreditch Arts Club

on its own, with projects completing this year including the Parkway Mews hotel in Mayfair, and Dyson’s R&D building in Bristol. The ID wing was also doing work on two massive residential towers in Russia before Ukraine brought that to a standstill.

All this shows that the firm recognised that it was a little too London-centric and made conscious efforts to diversify, branching out sectorally and geographically. So how does opening an arts club fit into this wider scope?

‘In 2019 we were bursting at the seams in the Tea Factory building,’ says Bayliss. ‘Derwent came to us and said it had heard we were a bit stretched upstairs and needed some

← BGY’s Oliver Bayliss, Matt Yeoman, Tina Connell and Paul White





The practice uses the club space for exhibitions, film screenings, and other events

more space.’ So, it offered an ‘amazing’ ground floor, BGY taking it on with the intention of using it more as an office building—perhaps with client facilities, a presentation room, a meeting room and other ancillary stuff—to relieve pressure on the ‘drawing board’ space. ‘And then COVID happens, and we have to rethink it.’

It responded first by letting it out, says director Amr Assaad, to some companies including a charity which aims to get homeless people back into work. From these meanwhile uses the practice came up with the idea of allowing members to come and use the facilities, which is what generated Shoreditch Arts Club. ‘And then we started to get into contact with a number of galleries and collectors.’

In a way this itself highlights how much Shoreditch has changed, says Assaad. When it set up in the Tea Building, if you left work late, the area was one of prostitutes and needles, whereas now it is home to cool, interesting retailers, and amazing galleries and studios, which helped the practice devise how this unit could become both a part of that street and community, and a central focus.

The club has also highlighted that BGY has amazing links with the creative world, Assaad goes on. It wasn’t necessarily looking for other links with developers or the architectural scene but rather beyond that to establishing further links with artists, photographers, musicians, DJs and others in the wider creative community. ‘It’s

become truly successful, in that we welcome as many people as we can of different backgrounds to come and use the space and open dialogue with us.’

Most of the artworks are on loan from London galleries, which use the space to show their work, as do private lenders, with artists themselves often appearing at preview shows on site. The works are changed very frequently, keeping the infrastructure to a minimum but allowing the artists to feel that they ‘own’ the space and can bring their communities with them, creating a less ‘stiff’ relationship than they might have with a ‘White Cube-type setting’ and something that is more ‘tactile’. BGY tries to reach out to emerging artists, as well as people like ‘great friends’ Gilbert and George, who chose the club’s boutique cinema to

show a film they’d made in 1984 but forgotten about called *The World According to Gilbert and George*. The ‘hub’ is also home to musicians, filmmakers and sculptors, as somewhere they can eat, drink and chat, says Yeoman.

And yet it feels a little resource heavy. How has it been, managing that whole process for a busy practice? Surely it is quite an outlay in terms of time and effort?

It comes in waves, says Bayliss, but depends largely on how you look at it. It is an alternative way of making an income and the staff use it on a day-to-day basis. ‘So, it’s kind of part of the DNA.’ Initially it was about creating, and inviting people into the club, and now it’s about editing, says Assaad.



Enlightenment—an art work at the 5,000-sq ft former loading bay club

## Q&A—BGY operations director Tina Connell

### What do you think of the club?

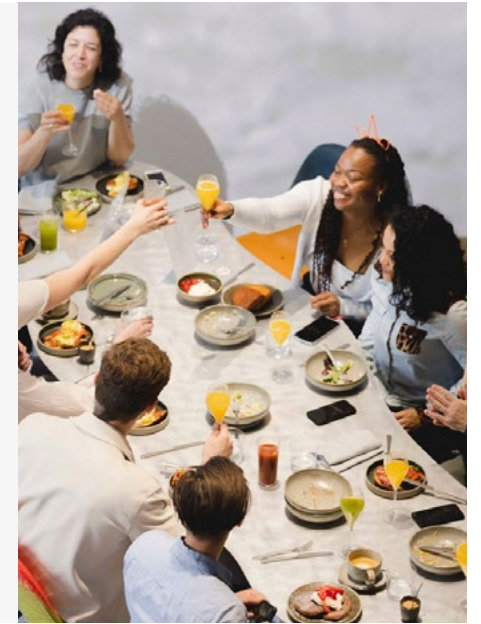
For me, Shoreditch Arts Club is BGY. It seems to capture the essence of the business; its entrepreneurial edge, the ‘Shoreditch originals’ spirit and the agency vibe.

### How often do you use it?

It’s my entrance into the office every morning. More often than not, I’ll run into a colleague and end up chatting. It’s a chance to hear about the day’s agenda, find out what events are planned at the club, and hear stories from the night before. Throughout the day, I make full use of the club... whether I’m attending large office gatherings or management meetings, or having informal catch-ups.

### Do you feel it is a boon to staff? If so, how?

Absolutely. And in so many ways! It’s a fantastic space where we come together in a relaxed, informal setting. At the same time, it serves as both a showroom and a ‘project space’ where our designers can experiment and test new ideas. On a broader level, it connects us with the local community in a meaningful way—opening us up to the street and welcoming Shoreditch in.



‘We get so many people wanting to be part of it. Actually, it’s almost more about selecting what we want.’

It had help, however. BGY hired Joel Williams, former chief executive of the Conduit Club and previously with Home House, Corbin & King, Conran Group and Alain Ducasse. ‘He came in and he knew how to set up the club,’ says Yeoman. He also brought in a general manager, a chef and all the hospitality staff that BGY would not have had a clue how to source, Yeoman adds. And on the art side they brought in a very enthusiastic curator and creative strategist, Ché Zara Blomfield. ‘Knowing what we didn’t know, we brought those two people in, and they really helped to get the momentum. If you were to try to do it completely on your own it would completely detract from your day job.’ That was similar to when BGY tried to do The Retreat, a trailer-transported modular home the firm designed that won a London Evening Standard award in 2005.

The club is also hired out for events including weddings, fashion shows for firms like Chanel, Archiboo events, graduate shows for the RCA, Archigram’s launch and events like the Conde Nast Restaurant Awards.

## ‘It’s just a place that we, as architects, can immerse ourselves in’

‘It’s a creative place. It’s easy to forget, certainly in a commercial setting, that we are creative people and it’s about influencing trends, discussions and anything that comes along with that should serve for what we do. There’s no measurable way other than what it makes. It’s just a place that we, as architects, can immerse ourselves in, to different degrees.’

It has also helped, adds Yeoman, in the post-COVID world, where many of BGY’s commercial clients are asking

how to get people back into the office. ‘We’re already saying, “Well, we’re doing this—our staff, our members, they all come down, they use it.” So, it’s another fresh way of looking at how to use workspace in a way that works for us.’

In a world in which people can connect by mobile phone so easily, the physical space has brought the opportunity to connect in a more meaningful and real way, adds Assaad. ‘It’s the actual feeling of putting people into a space—the draw that physical space has is incredible.’

Staff get free membership, with a discount on food and drink and the ability to bring in guests. Other practices do it in various ways too, of course, Squires with its Department Store and King’s Cross Tram Shed restaurant before, while Morris+Company is setting up a club-like structure following its opening of the Edit Restaurant at its Hackney premises. But it’s still little known that BGY runs the Shoreditch Arts Club—one prominent architect, enjoying a drink at the bar with Yeoman at the Archigram event—was completely in the dark, and it’s fine for the association not to be super-strong. ‘We really wanted it to be outward focused to the community,’ Yeoman says. ‘Not just another part of our office.’

It’s also a way of staying relevant, Bayliss adds. So, if a similar space became available next to the practice’s Madrid office would they do it all again? ‘I think we would think about it,’ says Yeoman. ‘We can’t help ourselves. We always think big. “Let’s take Shoreditch Arts Club and let’s go!”’

Speaking of geographical diversification, the practice is designing Colmore Gate in Birmingham, refurbishing the existing office tower and retaining 87 per cent of the original, which reduces carbon emissions by 1,728 tonnes. The 17-storey scheme has planning approval after an earlier more ambitious version with extra floors was thrown out. Like a number of practices, BGY is being asked to look at the future of Canary Wharf, to figure out how to rework a few buildings, alongside future-proofing main tower, having already reimaged the YY London building for Quadrant and Oaktree Capital. It is also looking at a larger, hush-hush residential





BGY in Brighton—the practice's Edward Street Quarter project from the air



Boadilla Hills—BGY's residential-led development of 4000 new homes, west of Madrid

scheme in London. Yeoman says the big problem hampering such projects currently is the higher risk buildings gateway two requirement under the Building Safety Act. 'Everything is getting held up,' he says. It is pressing ahead with co-living schemes, one in planning for a site in Wimbledon and another starting on site on New Kent Road. Planning struggles in this area, Yeoman believes, owing to the size of the rooms and the mix of the units. 'So really you have to try to do it through hotel consent rather than residential.'

So, the future. In another eight or nine years, where does Yeoman think he will be? Stepping back as a consultant? 'It's down to these guys, where it goes, what they do and how they will do it.' But the main thing is for BGY, a 30-year-old practice by then, to be still 'relevant,' in a fiercely competitive market and one which Yeoman believes will only get harder with the rise of AI challenging all the creative professions.

Assaad has another way of putting it. 'If you had asked 10 years ago where we thought we'd be now, I don't think we would have said we would have Shoreditch Arts Club. It's the unknowns—if there's an opportunity, that's what excites us.'

It's something that they talk as a practice about a lot, Yeoman adds, this business of being entrepreneurial, stretching right back to the days of creating The Retreat as a solution when one of its clients wanted them to help plan out a caravan park. Having seen some of the 'white wrinkly tin rubbish', the team resolved to design something better. 'And before we knew it, we'd immersed ourselves in the Caravan Act of 1968, designed this mobile home and it went absolutely nuts.' A separate company, 'Retreat Home' was born, so it has always had this desire to diversify and innovate deep within. It likes to think that the staff attracted to the firm are 'influencers', not in the Instagram sense, but people who make a difference in trying new things. 'We like the entrepreneur, to have some kind of influence, or be massively creative. Those are the things we love in people.'

None of this is easy, though, Bayliss sums up. 'There's an element of moonlighting about it, but you can pretty much do anything you want.'



Spanish skies—BGY's mixed use Skylight project in Madrid



BGY's Dace Road—four residential-led buildings in Fish Island Village



# FIVE MINUTES WITH...

## HOLLY LEWIS

In the run-up to International Women's Day in March, *David Taylor* caught up with We Made That's Holly Lewis to talk through her work on safety audits and designing safer spaces

**David Taylor:** Hi, Holly, how are you doing?

**Holly Lewis:** Hi. Good, thanks, David. How are you?

**DT:** I'm very good, thank you. I'd like to talk to you about women's safety in the city in the run-up to International Women's Day on 8 March, and particularly the work you've been doing in this area. Could you tell me in broad detail about the safety audits pilot project you've done, commissioned by TfL and the Mayor's Office?

**HL:** Sure, absolutely. As you said, it's commissioned by Transport for London and the Mayor's Office for policing and crime—which is a bit of a new one for us, but has been very interesting. The pilot project is intended to inform those organisations, but also be relevant to others in the ways we can think about how to incorporate women's voices when we're thinking about investment in public spaces and the design of public spaces. Specifically, there's been a mayoral commitment to undertake women's safety audits in London. While I think we can all imagine in our heads what that might be, there's actually nothing on paper that says what a women's safety audit actually is.

**DT:** Yeah. What does it look like?

**HL:** Yes. So that's our exam question—what is a women's safety audit? And that's what we've been working on over about the last year. We had five pilot locations across London—various types of places. We were working in Brixton, Walthamstow, Brent, Uxbridge and Paddington, looking at those places with groups of women. The process that we proposed, which wasn't explicit in the brief but was something

that we felt was important, was for this to be a peer-led process. We recruited 47 community researchers—women in each of these locations—and then they were trained. They received support and resources to then go out and undertake their own audits with their networks and peers, asking questions. How safe do you feel? How does this place make you feel? Do you feel nervous? Do you feel comfortable? Do you feel anxious? There were conversations about experiences that

they've had in those places, happening peer to peer. So, between a sister and a sister, or between friends, between flatmates, rather than us as professionals coming in with a clipboard to ask these sensitive things.

**DT:** When you say place, do you mean the wider definition of, for instance, Brixton? Or a street in Brixton? How did that frame itself?

**HL:** So, these were set by the client group, and they were quite broad. In Brixton we were primarily focused on Brixton Road and the area around the Tube station, but we'd let people be guided by the groups that they were working with, along the lines of 'well, let me tell you about this area, this is problematic'. That was part of the process—it's almost

like a diagnostic, really, in this area in general, with some sort of broader spatial parameters but not a hard red line. That process of having the community researchers leading their own research—and asking, 'where are the areas that you feel that we should talk about?'—allowed them to set parameters. Or, choose a walking route speak to people about it.

We gave them a number of different methods and processes they were trained in to undertake the research. Some of those were quite specific, like checklists. Are the lights



Lewis—on a mission for better, safer places



Audits in action—the work included the recruitment of 47 community researchers

working? Is the pavement in good condition? Those sorts of things. Others were a little bit more free form. We called them multi-sensory mapping. For example, one was about different exercises, like asking how tense someone's shoulders are feeling right now, whether they can get in touch with how their body is, is it telling them safe or not safe. Or, asking them to close their eyes for 30 seconds and see what they notice. Or what do people notice during a very slow 360-degrees rotation that make them feel safe or unsafe in that place. So, it was quite fine grain, actually, the sort of exercises that we're asking people to undertake, but it was important that we weren't too prescriptive, I think, about valid questions or answers.

**DT:** I note from the blurb that the audits included women aged 17 to 79, which seems very specific, meaning there was somebody who was 79, I presume. Did you note any difference in terms of trends between the younger respondents and the older respondents, or were there any other trends across any other groups?

**HL:** I think one of the key things that we found was not so much about trends, but about the diversity of individual experiences. So, if we're thinking about Walthamstow Central, there's a very busy street, and across Market Street that's very populated. Some people said that they that made them feel very, very safe. Others felt like, well, this is just too much, neurologically—I'm a bit overwhelmed so I'm going to take the back road instead, just to be somewhere a bit calmer.' So, it was very hard to make an individual rule. But some very specific things came up. For example, one of our researchers spoke to some school-aged girls, and they all reported that they were more likely to receive unwanted attention when out and about in public spaces if they were wearing their school uniform, compared with if they weren't.

**DT:** Really?

**HL:** With those kinds of things, unless you're sort of leaving the space for that conversation when are you ever going to do a survey form that allows you to pick up that kind of

feedback? So, it was more the wide diversity of experiences, which isn't necessarily the easiest thing to design for. But I think it's important that we understand the full spectrum and colour and diversity and fidelity, I guess, of women's experiences in the city.

**DT:** How safe do you feel in London?

**HL:** I would say I feel pretty safe. I think maybe that's (laughs) my personal life circumstances at the moment, because I'm not out particularly late. I am a confident cyclist. I'm not often moving around, particularly on my own. At those times when I have felt threatened in the past have probably been that kind of classic journey home later into the evening. Unfortunately for me, I don't get the opportunity to do that very much anymore because of the small children I am responsible for! I would say, personally, I generally feel pretty safe, but I also have been in London for a long time, and I'm, I don't know, a belligerent (laughs) woman of a certain age.

I think that was one of the other things that's interesting in our feedback; that people are able to reflect on their past experiences. In that period in your 20s, there's a certain kind of threat that you can feel from the city. As a child, there's maybe different kinds of threat. And what was interesting is the trade off, maybe between road safety and personal safety that some people reported, the little tactics that women use to help themselves feel safer, like walking around instead of stopping at a bus stop, just walking back and forth past the bus stop to make it look like you're going somewhere until your bus comes. There are these sorts of little habits that people get into...

**DT:** ...keys in the hand is another one I've heard, which is a bit frightening,

**HL:** Yes, that comes up a lot. I mean, I was at school when I first remember somebody describing to me, well, this is the thing that you do if you're not feeling safe. So that doesn't feel new, and I actually don't know that that's lessening. I think that that's still definitely something that happens. →





Streetwise—researchers quizzing people in urban locations, such as Brixton, here



‘What we’re trying to do is set out a process which is robust and rigorous’

**DT:** Is it your perception that safety for women in the city is becoming more problematic or less? What’s your sense of that?

**HL:** I think it’s tricky. I mean, my perception is that we’re talking about it more, which feels like a good thing, and feels like that must lead to some level of change. But whether that means that we’re then more conscious of it... I think it’s a funny thing. I’ve had this conversation with a couple of men as well, who were surprised that that is an experience. To me, it’s surprising that you could have had a period where you were walking around on your own late at night and you didn’t feel scared. That there’s a sort of assumption that that’s a scary thing and that there is the whole half of society—or maybe I’m speaking in broad terms about men—but that wouldn’t be the way that you walk around. It’s mind-blowing to me, maybe in the same way that it’s mind blowing to some men that you would walk around with your keys, and I think that means that we’re all maybe more conscious of this issue, which perhaps makes it feel more dominant. And clearly cases like Sarah Everard are so immensely troubling that it perhaps feels worse. But I think that the greater level of interrogation that’s happening on this matter brings it more to prominence, which maybe makes it feel, and perhaps it is, worse. But I’m hopeful that that leads to change.

**DT:** So finally, what needs to happen? What’s a good output for this material? Should there be more work done in this area? Is there anything in terms of legislation or recommendations that could be put out in terms of the design of our cities, or buildings even?

**HL:** We’ve tried to steer away from giving specific design

recommendations. And actually, when you think about it, the idea that we could say, oh, so long as your lights are all 20 meters apart from each other, everybody will feel safe—it doesn’t make any sense. That isn’t the case, and that isn’t what we’re reporting. What we’re trying to do is set out a process which is robust and rigorous, and that, as I said before, is a really good diagnostic to understand what the issues in relation to women’s safety are, if you’re thinking about investment or design in a particular area.

So, a good outcome of this process for us is that that is adopted by Transport for London, by the Mayor’s Office for Policing and Crime, by anybody who thinks about spaces in the city, I guess, particularly in London at the moment. And that they’re saying, let’s make sure that we’ve really got to the bottom of what our safety issues are, not making assumptions based on crime statistics, which are poorly reported, or that sorting out the lighting in this corner, for example will make it better. That there isn’t a go-to sort of checklist of if you design these things in this certain way that will address these issues, but that you’re hearing from women and girls about their own lived experiences in that place. And if that becomes the modus operandi of dealing with public space in London, then I think that’s a really good outcome—that we’re all consciously thinking about it and not making assumptions.

**DT:** Hear, hear! Well, thank you very much for your time. It’s really fascinating work.

**HL:** Thanks very much.

**DT:** Cheers, Holly. ●

Jas Lehal; Nina Robinson



The audits involved asking for the real experiences of women from 17 to 70



# GOLD MEDAL LEGACY

In this special feature we look at the legacy left by the 2012 Olympic Games across Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, Newham, and beyond. By *David Taylor*







# BANKING ON SUCCESS

The LLDC is entering a post-Olympic legacy phase, with new people at the helm. *David Taylor* travels to East Bank to meet chief executive Shazia Hussain and V&A deputy director Tim Reeve



‘Regeneration without culture becomes, I think, gentrification.’

So says Shazia Hussain, chief executive of the London Legacy Development Corporation as it prepares to open the East Bank’s V&A East and Storehouse over at Here East, ushering in the next cycle of development in Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park—and beyond.

And she should know, having spent years delivering change in neighbouring boroughs including Waltham Forest, Tower Hamlets and Brent. ‘I feel like I’ve come home she says, reminiscing about her early work helping to transform Hackney Wick and Fish Island—the people and the place. ‘It was in my blood, because I kind of cut my teeth on East London.’ Hussain also explains that, as someone with Pakistani heritage, if she hadn’t been to university she wouldn’t have had the experiences she has had, because she was introduced to different cultures and experiences through people. ‘I think culture plays a big part in giving you experiences, that give you contact, that give you networks, that give you aspirations... culture is fundamental to how we exist as a community, how we live and the way that we want to interact with each other.’

We are here on a sunny May day at Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, sitting outside the new Sadler’s Wells theatre, just along from the London College of Fashion where a bunch of students are hanging out on the steps outside. I’m with Hussain and Tim Reeve, the deputy director and COO of the V&A, whose Storehouse scheme is now open at Here East, with the main East museum by O’Donnell + Tuomey set to come next year.

So, what’s the plan? Hussain puts it in a nutshell. ‘What we’ve been doing in East London, not just in Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park but also with our partners and with our borough

partners, is really trying to use the richness of a culture that already exists and elevate that so that we can link that into opportunities.’

Phase one was about the Olympic Games coming to the area, bringing much-needed investment into East London, says Hussain. ‘And we were trying to pivot the world towards it,’ she says, “catalysing” that interest.’ Phase two has been about building—buying the land, getting in that investment and partners, and realising it as a physical space.

But phase three, the one at the top of Hussain’s in-box today, is more about optimisation and activation, she explains. ‘How do you take these assets in this amazing place, which

is, by the way, unique globally? We’ve done the bit about making a story that we have a place that’s globally relevant, an amazing park with amazing partners. We now need to make sure that we deliver the last bit of the mission which was always to change the lives of East Londoners. So, it’s about inclusive growth, and you can’t get that unless you activate the pieces that we have and make the whole greater than the parts.’

They will be able to measure all of this, Hussain hopes, and the impact it all

has via a series of roundtables on the place as an innovation district, from a skills and employment perspective, and perhaps a longitudinal study on the impact that it may make over the next five or 10 years. It is early days on this, not least since Hussain has only been in post since November last year, but the LLDC recognises it has to be able to demonstrate the difference it has made, and will make.

One big change to the area is profoundly cultural, with the line of institutions that now face the Olympic Park. Sadler’s Wells is already open, along with the College of Fashion, with the BBC to come and, in a striking building designed by RIBA Gold Medal-winning practice O’Donnell + Tuomey, V&A East. →



Legacy in action—Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park





Culture club—East Bank's line of attractions—V&A East, London College of Fashion, UAL, BBC Music Studios and Sadler's Wells East

Tim Reeve, in post since 2013, traces the genesis of the museum's arrival (it opens next spring), beginning in 2013 when it was approached by then mayor Boris Johnson. 'He asked if we were interested in being an anchor cultural tenant for a new legacy development here,' says Reeve. At the same time, as part of what was then called the Olympicopolis project, Johnson had asked UCL if it would be the anchor educational tenant. 'I quite liked that name because it was like an Albertopolis for the 21st century,' Reeve smiles.

The museum spent a year or two working out how to turn a tentative 'yes' in response to that invitation into a proper project. 'We were never going to do a cookie-cutter franchise V&A here; we were going to do something quite distinctive,' he says. But by the time it had worked things out, two things

happened—it was moved out of Blyth House, which is where the museum used to keep its reserve collection, and Sadiq Khan redrew the project site. Ultimately, this resulted in the much better and more compelling version of V&A East—a smaller museum at East Bank, as well as Storehouse, a 10-minute walk across the park. 'Really, the reason for us being here is an opportunity to re-articulate and reimagine the founding mission of the V&A, which is about art and design for all,' says Reeve. 'It's about creativity to affect change for a new audience.'

Before this, many studies had shown that audiences in East London did not feel like national institutions of any sort were responding to their lives. This was a chance for a new start. That is particularly true of Storehouse, Reeve believes,



Making on show—V&A's Storehouse at Here East



V&A Storehouse: 'a call to arms' to museums across London

a 'pioneering and innovative' project that does not exist elsewhere in the cultural ecosystem. 'Storehouse really is like the V&A's workshop or back of house, as a visitor experience,' he explains. 'It's completely self-guided so it isn't just the preserve of those who know of the established practitioner or the established researcher with the right academic credentials. It's walk-in, off the street, self-guided, to really unpack and reveal the full magic of the museum.'

This is important because it demystifies all the career paths that museums can offer, beyond all the front-of-house roles like gallery assistants and curators. Storehouse unpacks that, enabling people in East London to see the benefits of career choices not previously seen as open to them. What binds the museum and Storehouse together is the notion of 'making'—something that will resonate with its East London audience. The Storehouse, which opened at the end of May, represents a 'call to arms' for museums across London to be more ambitious about what they do with their collections. In September, a permanent David Bowie Centre, featuring much of the artist's archives, will add to Storehouse's draw.

The employment metrics represented by this and other initiatives are crucial, Hussain agrees. Bringing more people into the park is one thing, but if to really going to change the lives of East Londoners, 'we have to do something more fundamental,' she goes on. 'We have to start with the schools and their interaction and experiences of Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park so that pupils start to have aspirations themselves, build their contact and have those experiences, which lead them to want to do particular types of GCSEs, or go to particular universities and know that those jobs are for them. Using the community as a place of opportunity rather than a place of deficit.'

To this end, the plan is in part to help communities that may have felt disengaged with London, building on a programme that broadly succeeded, they believe, because of a clear vision with quality at its heart that people held to,

coupled with strong leadership and investment. Along with the pivot which brought culture to the fore.

How do Hussain and Reeve evaluate the legacy left so far from the 2012 Olympics?

## 'As a piece of urban regeneration and placemaking over and above the component parts, it's a great park'

For Reeve, it has been extraordinary how quickly the park has been built out and developed. But more than that—how it has been 'taken back' by East London after the locals had to in effect stand back and allow it to be created and used for the Games. 'Then there was I think a period after the Olympics when lots of new developments were happening and it was closed off, in a way. But now I think you get quite a strong sense that the ownership of the park has been taken back by people who live and work around here.'

In one sense, Reeve goes on, 10 to 12 years is a long time, but in another not long at all. 'I think there is a real sense that this is an East London park. And that has been very, very successful.' The flipside of doing things at pace, of course, is that not everything is perfect. 'But if you look at it in aggregate, as a piece of urban regeneration and placemaking over and above the component parts, it's a great park with lots of different aspects to it and the character of it changes. I think that's the way you test whether something is a great park.' →



PRP's Chobham Manor—880 new homes, shops, and community facilities





Park life — families enjoying Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park

Hussain believes it is an ‘incredible’ legacy, even though it is not yet complete. She points to more than 5,000 homes that will be built on LLDC land, more than 1,000 of which have completed thus far—33,000 if you count the London Olympic Boroughs. Then there’s the culture, the research institutions, the tech and creative side at Here East. When she talks to people in New York or Canada who are trying something similar, their projects pale in comparison to London’s scale. The buildings on the site are all publicly permeable, Hussain points out, certainly on the ground floors. And the park is definitely a local resource, which they know through surveys—to the extent that even Sadler’s Wells hosts locals on their way to watch West Ham in the stadium (now not in LLDC’s control) on match day.

There are four entry points for the four boroughs, and two schools—Harris Academy Chobham and Mossbourne Riverside Primary Academy. ‘For me that’s a great legacy but there’s more to do,’ says Hussain. ‘And that is how to elevate these pieces, these assets, so that they don’t stay in isolation, and only those who can afford it or those that can seek it come here. The assets need to feel like an offer, an experience, and, importantly, an opportunity that the partners are very committed to for the people of East London. And that will be about jobs, it will be about opportunities, it will be about education, and it will be about experiences. That’s what we have to do for the next five to 10 years, and we call that inclusive growth. We call that helping to change the lives of East Londoners.’ ●



‘Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park is a vital part of London’s future, offering a unique opportunity to enhance the lives of Newham residents and beyond. As a key area for inward investment, it will deliver wide-ranging economic and social benefits, creating more opportunities for all our communities to thrive.

Inclusive regeneration will be central to this growth, ensuring that local people directly benefit from new opportunities and the transformation taking place within the area.

Through Opportunity Newham, I am committed to tackling inequality, investing in young people, and ensuring that the health, happiness and wellbeing of our residents are at the heart of how we measure success. With our ambitious housing and regeneration schemes, we are building a stronger, fairer Newham.

I look forward to continuing our partnership with the LLDC, making sure Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park remains a place of growth, sustainability, and shared prosperity for everyone.’

**Rokhsana Fiaz OBE, Mayor of Newham**

LLDC, Joe Howard, Jason Hawkes, Morley von Sternberg, Hufton+Crow, PRP, Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park



Hackney Bridge at Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park — canalside workspace, restaurants and bars

### LLDC’s new board members

The corporation appointed three new board members this May to help accelerate investment and inclusive growth in and around Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park:

#### Jude Kelly, OBE, CBE

Part of the bid team who won the Olympic Games in the first place. Hussain: ‘A big hitter in her own right. I think she’s going to be fantastic, because she’s going to have that wealth of experience but hopefully this will get her excited about new stuff.’

#### Jackie Sadek

‘She’s a legend, she’s connected. Part of what we want with our board is to elevate what we’re doing.’

#### Owen Purcell

(former managing partner with EY)

‘Owen brings really strong experience of EY auditing and the commercial management side of things. And I think that’s really important, because our ultimate goal is to be self-financing.’



Shaping Newham

The Shape Newham programme launched back in 2019 to co-design and install 18 imaginative and original public space improvement projects across the borough in close collaboration with local residents and businesses and backed by mayor Rokhsana Fiaz. ‘Newham is a great place to live and we want to make it better’, said Fiaz. ‘People are at the heart of everything we do’. Installations completed last year delivered by a team including Office S&M, AOC Architecture, Carver Haggard, Europa, Social Broadcasts and Local Works Studio.



NEWHAM SPECIAL



Luke O'Donovan





# MAKING IT WORK

*David Taylor meets Metropolitan Workshop, marking 20 years in the business, to discover the secret to its collaborative approach and passion for ‘pre-occupation evaluations’*

Newham means a lot to Metropolitan Workshop.

Now celebrating its 20th year as a practice, with offices in Farringdon, London and Dublin, the borough has been part of its key stamping ground for years. And given director Neil Deely’s long stints as a design lead for the council, it’s only natural that a large chunk of its work over the years has been focused on the London borough, not least because its main stock in trade—creating good quality housing, often on regenerated estate—is right up Newham’s alley.

I meet up with some of the key characters at the practice at the London end of the operation—an office that has a light, airy and unusual atmosphere about it, helped by the shopfront to the street with its models or works from other designers and illustrators that sometimes draw lay people in to have a nose about or enquire more.

‘It’s very nice to have the shopfront—It’s become our identity, really,’ says Deely, chatting to me alongside partners Jonny McKenna and Tom Mitchell and, live from Dublin via video link, director Denise Murray.



London calling—Neil Deely and Tom Mitchell



Dublin duo—Jonny McKenna and Denise Murray

The space had been home to Alan Baxter and Associates, one of the early proponents of shared workspace, before the practice moved back across the road. And the shopfront style—also used to good effect by Peter Barber in King’s Cross, for one—is also a handy space to hold exhibitions on other designers, illustrators or topics that they are interested in, such as suburbia.

So, do people come in and try to buy a bit of architecture? ‘We’ve had all sorts popping in,’ laughs Deely. This has ranged from American tourists asking if models were for sale to people assuming they were some sort of internet café. But one day a big project came about by someone walking past then coming in and offering them the job to design a major project in the Dead Sea. It worked for staff too.

‘Part of the reason I’m working here is because I walked by and looked in the shopfront and saw all the work being done in Ireland back in 2006,’ smiles McKenna. He was finishing a masters in urban design at Westminster at the time, saw some images of Ballymun, looked them up, and the rest is history. All because of a shopfront on the ground floor. It goes beyond people just knowing where you are and into the realms of attracting good staff, via visibility on the street and in the community.

This feels kind of appropriate for the firm, too, offering an open door to people when there’s an event on. ‘At one of the Christmas drinks things we did we had an opera singer walk in and ask whether we minded him joining in,’ recalls Deely. ‘We asked him in, he had a couple of drinks and then sang for us. And then invited us to the Chelsea Arts Club to return the hospitality’.

Over in Dublin the single-level studio of 18 staff does not quite have the same relationship with the street but is ranged around a nice courtyard and enjoys a social aspect with the other tenants of the old whiskey distillery building. This Liberties area of the city is, again, one in which the practice has a long tradition of involvement and is undergoing major regeneration.

Talk turns to Norway, not least because Deely’s wife is Norwegian, but mainly because of the work the practice has tried to get involved with there. There was a time when that country’s growth trajectory was similar to Ireland’s. ‘They were finding themselves with lots of things to do and were looking outside their country boundaries for expertise and help,’ says Deely. Metropolitan Workshop did a huge amount of work, much of it in strategic planning and masterplanning, along with a few buildings. As so often, however, ‘foreigners’ in





Annesley Gardens, Metropolitan Workshop's family homes in Ranelagh, Dublin

competitions for bridges and the like fell at the final hurdle once the nation 'grew up' in a design sense and felt the home team and some of the Danish practices were easier to work with.

After a spell of jobs in places like Libya and Jordan, having 'a good go at jumping on planes and going places', the practice switched its attention back to the UK. 'There's lot of work to do and lots of things to achieve, closer to home,' says Deely.

Today, ongoing projects pinned to the basement wall include one for Hadley as part of a multi-architect team working on the GlaxoSmithKline site with firms like Haworth Tompkins as masterplanner, dRMM and SEW. Alongside is the model-making area—even with all the digital tools at their disposal, the practice finds that you just can't beat a physical model. Sometimes, clients need a little persuasion, Deely says, but after making a model they all become unanimous in backing the design.

We pass a model of a rather lovely Norwegian pedestrian and cycle bridge proposal which did not quite come off, Metropolitan Workshop and AKT coming second in an open competition in Drammen, a large port town south of Oslo at the end of a fjord where a suspension bridge was ultimately built. The industrial city was apparently known as 'the armpit of Norway' but over recent decades has undergone a transformation, getting back its riverfront and making new crossings between one side and the other. At the time, there were precious few disability regulations in Norway, explains Tom Mitchell, so they took it upon themselves to make sure it was compliant with the UK regs on accessibility. 'Hence the slight meander, because it was made it long enough to get that gentle ramp,' he says. The kinks in the deck were also defined by pointing towards local landmarks. But alas it did not cut the mustard with the judges. Perhaps they could find another place for it, such as Hammersmith...

The 20th year of the practice has almost come up on the rails, but has focused the mind, says Deely, allowing the staff to reflect on where they have come from, and indeed, where they are going next.

Where does the name come from, for starters? When they started out, in 2004, Deely explains, lots of practices were asking themselves what they might do next. Emerging from MacCormac Jamieson Prichard the partners chose to anonymise themselves. But the other reason for calling the practice Metropolitan Workshop was that they wanted to practice architecture differently. That is, without one person having a vision and thrusting it forward. 'We wanted to find a way of acting which is much more inclusive.' 'Workshop' fitted the bill as being an open and inclusive term, and 'metropolitan' because the bulk of their work was urban and suburban.

This was a big attraction, says Murray, this emphasis on being a collaborative place of work both internally and as it faces the community and to other consultants. 'I've

always been curious and interested about what other people think, no matter whether it's somebody who's a local in a community or living in a housing project that, you know, we're looking at a regeneration for,' she says, 'or whether the transport engineer has the best idea, really, about how we're going to link up this new neighbourhood... It's not just about being open and enabling those conversations, but it's also about providing the structure and leading those conversations, so it's not a passive act.'

Sometimes, she goes on, when people talk about co-design and participatory design, there is a sense of the architects stepping back or being embarrassed about their role. 'But we are very overtly involved in leading and enabling those conversations and making sure that all the



Barchester Street—115 affordable homes on a former factory site in Poplar



The Carpenters Estate, Newham, where Metropolitan Workshop worked on the masterplan with Proctor & Matthews Architects

different voices at the table, and even some of the quieter ones, are allowed to come to the fore. So, it's a very active thing, being collaborative and providing that structure and enabling multiple voices to come forward... it's definitely not a soundbite—it's really integral to everything that we do'.

This collaboration extends to getting together as a practice socially, with an away day most years. One of these involved a trip to Bruton in Somerset and the Hauser & Wirth gardens where they 'renewed their vows, as it were', employing Jane Wernick to help examine what it meant to work together. 'It was about everyone understanding and having a voice in how we practice what we do,' says Deely. They produced a book on the practice that exemplified some of this and the variety of the work they do, aimed at celebrating their 10th anniversary through interviews with clients past and present but calling it '12'—because it took two years to put together. This idea of a collective conversation is one that they feel the industry is catching up with, moving away from the professional siloes that existed two decades ago, and with clients expecting to be part of the process rather than being handed a set of ideas. 'We feel vindicated in some respects, and very happy that this way of working is becoming more popular, more fulfilling and more satisfying.'

Mitchell adds that this extends to communities. The practice seeks to empower locals by giving them some fundamental training in best practice design and the design process. 'We still like to teach residents, for example, about density, and viability.' A side benefit of this is that if viability

challenges emerge as the design progresses, the residents understand. 'We've got a couple of examples where that has been absolutely key to residents supporting schemes.'

And the largest example of this most recently was the Carpenters Estate, one of the largest estate regeneration schemes around.

McKenna offers another example—the Westbury Estate in Lambeth, where Metropolitan Workshop was brought in after the original architect's vision had been presented to the residents as 'this is what you're getting'. 'That kicked off a chain of events which is familiar to most estate regeneration projects,' says McKenna. Metropolitan Workshop suggested setting up six workshops over six weeks, each looking at factors like density, height, parking or open space. Density was particularly memorable. 'I remember we had these jars of ping pong balls—you know, small, medium and large—and sort of filling the jars, and saying it's not just the numbers of ping pong balls, it's the size of the ping pong balls that you get there. Because 100 dwellings per hectare that are all three-bedroomed flats will look very different to 200 dwellings per hectare that are all one-bedroomed flats.' What resulted was a clear direction of travel that incorporated a residents' brief.

The industry appears to have shifted in this general way while retaining the provision of design leadership, as professionals. Deely believes that the fear of this way of working has been because it implies a lack of control, but that the practice has proved that there can be instead a very inclusive



kind of dialogue. ‘The more information you give people, the better the outcomes,’ he says, ‘and the quicker you get there. If you try to heavily edit them, people don’t trust the process because you’re not being open. There is this massive human dynamic, particularly when it comes to communities—we found that the more information they have, the more comfortable they feel, strangely enough, and the better outcomes you get.’

People get energised by change, adds McKenna, and that energy can be positive or negative. It’s surely to hit the negative associations at the front end and turn it into a positive movement? What doesn’t work in this scenario? Telling people what they’re getting goes down ‘like a lead balloon’, says McKenna. And working behind closed doors is another. When everything is held back and presented as a *fait accompli*, that’s when trust fails. It almost doesn’t even matter if a scheme is good or bad, he believes. Murray adds that a positive move is to be up front and let the communities know what they can and cannot influence—and, indeed, what is governed by law, such as the size of kitchens.

Are communities more powerful today, with the rise of social media, in protesting against projects than they were 20 years ago? They are certainly better informed, says Deely, and perhaps more demanding. And that is a very good thing. Where we trip up is in not providing opportunities for people to input into the process, except through very narrow channels in planning. There is a general acceptance about the need to build more homes, but many are being put off by what they see

being built, Deely believes. Much of it is poor quality and lacks character, so he can see why there may be resistance. But early dialogue helps, and is put most to the test in the most rarefied and toughest end of it—estate regeneration.

There are almost always what Deely calls ‘contours’ of approval and disapproval, but through dialogue these can be melted away. McKenna adds that most people only get involved in planning issues when they see an application and suddenly get active about it, relating more to a prospective building in the neighbourhood than to a complex development plan that is just too overwhelming to download. When site notices go up, it suddenly becomes ‘real’ to people. ‘It’s interesting—how do you bridge that gap between a development plan and site strategy?’ he asks.

As part of its research activities, the practice looked into new kinds of suburbia on the back of the work undertaken by the late Richard MacCormac, with whom it had entered and won a competition, exploring the notion of higher density suburbs. Now it is building one such ‘homestead’ scheme in Swindon for the Nationwide Building Society on council land, featuring mixed occupancy and tenures, including later living, in the same block. ‘The whole thing was about creating friendships around these communal spaces in order to establish community quickly,’ says Mitchell. Essentially Metropolitan Workshop is a proponent of creating denser developments with shared amenities, building efficiently like the Victorians rather than the standard car-dominated English fare of today. The research again brought

in other architects like Levitt Bernstein, Proctor Matthews and Sarah Wigglesworth to look at what a new kind of suburbia might mean, resulting in an exhibition, round tables and a document with a series of take-aways about what new settlements could look like, when the debate about this kind of thing was rarer.

The Irish office is similarly involved with this kind of model, working with the state developer the Land Development Agency. In fact, in Dublin perhaps 80 per cent of its work is for the state or local authority, which is probably the opposite ratio to London. It is working in Limerick, too, which is about to get a mayor, and may act as a model for other Irish cities like Dublin and Cork, and potentially swing funding away from the central government to the cities themselves, modelled on places like Barcelona, where the mayor has more power to bring in development and a vision. In many ways Ireland is ahead of the UK, says Deely, in terms of environmental performance and regulations as well as on compact settlements.

It is also working on the design guide for student housing, says Murray, looking at 16 different student housing case studies across six different countries. The assumption was that there would be a construction-based solution, but it turns out that it will be more about tenure, policy, delivery and finance that will deliver affordability. ‘I feel very proud that we’re in there with our ethos, which is student-centred and high-quality design, because I think we’re having a real impact on that conversation,’ says Murray.



All mod cons—Mapleton Crescent tower for Pocket



Swindon Carriage Works—industrial to workspace

Deely spools through a few more projects, including 100 per cent affordable housing in Limehouse Cut, Canary Wharf and Mapleton Crescent in Wandsworth for Pocket Living, which at 27 storeys was the tallest steel framed modular residential building in Europe. There are other schemes, too, such as 278 homes for South Dublin County Council as the first phase of a large masterplan, and some affordable homes in Lewisham on an existing arts and crafts estate which reads like part of the original radial estate masterplan.

‘It’s fair to say that when we set up there was a lot of masterplanning and regeneration work, but we seem to have transferred and drifted towards more architecture projects,’ says Deely. ‘The point is that we have, through 20 years, been looking at the detail and the strategic.’

## ‘We coined a phrase: pre-occupancy evaluation’

The biggest project it ever worked on was 79 kilometres of the Jordanian side of the Dead Sea, where the client wanted a strategy to increase tourism potential. At the time, Foster and Partners was working on the Red to Dead Canal and also the Jordan masterplan—Metropolitan Workshop was working on the bit in the middle, with two or three resorts on the Israeli side and just a couple of hotels on the Jordanian side. The proposition here was to not build too much at all, not least because of the difficulty in getting water to the site but also because it was looking at how to do tourism sensitively.

The practice worked with WSP, which proposed some very isolated locations for ‘sensible’ amounts of tourism, and with Professor Robert Fisk at Imperial College, who pointed to the Scottish Estates as a model for using the assets without spending the asset. ‘But otherwise, we were saying that the best thing to do would be to leave them all alone. I don’t think that was the answer they were expecting.’

And then there is the Carpenters Estate, ‘the thing left behind by the Olympics’ on which Rokhsana Fiaz committed to working with residents as part of her mayoral mandate. ‘She committed to the people of Newham that she was going to look after their best interests,’ says Deely. ‘She’s out all the time, meeting people. I don’t know quite how she does it!’ The politics, here, allowed the masterplan to happen, and Metropolitan Workshop repeated its methodology of being open about everything, resulting in support from residents and a very high approval and turnout in the ballot. ‘It’s a good-news story, I think, in the current climate,’ says Deely. The project—some 2,500 new homes with some of the towers retained, others refurbished, and all the streets retained—has a new connection to Stratford station, which itself is undergoing a review. ‘It’s something we felt very privileged to be helping to lead on.’

So that’s Metropolitan Workshop at 20—a practice which strives to find out what makes people tick, and lets the architecture follow.

‘The common theme is just trying to understand the conditions around which success might happen, and trying to evaluate those first,’ says Deely. ‘We coined a phrase—pre-occupancy evaluation—the notion of taking some time trying to understand the people, the community and the place, and let that drive the architecture. It sounds simple, but it isn’t often the way things happen.’ ●



# THE NEXT CHAPTER

Professor Greg Clark takes a deep dive into Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, tracing its history and future



### Places that host the world

There is a special vibration in places that have hosted the world. At contests, events, exhibitions, global moments, or through significant breakthroughs and discoveries, where global dimensions or are audiences involved, the meaning of place is amplified.

London has hosted more than its share.

### London 1851: the Great Exhibition, South Kensington

The Great Exhibition of 1851 in London, the first of the great world expos, gave Britain, and the imperial Queen Victoria, global prominence and a new kind of soft power which the UK has traded on since. The institutions created to host that show of cultural and scientific might (the Albert Hall; three museums—V&A, Science, and Natural History; and Imperial College) still define the special zone that is South Kensington in London, and still reverberate with that 1851 moment.

### London 1951: the Festival of Britain, South Bank

Six years after the end of WWII, with the UK still in the doldrums, the Festival of Britain was inaugurated to restore national pride and begin the regeneration of the South Bank of the Thames. The first cycle of regeneration of London’s South Bank created a cultural hub south of the river and provided a spur to multiple cycles of waterfront regeneration that were continued and augmented by the Millennium celebrations in 2000.

### London 2012 and re-endowing East London

For centuries, East London had been defined by its role as London’s industrial engine, home to docks, heavy industries and armament production. East London also became a place of great social diversity, as one of the only accessible and affordable entry gateways into London for poorer migrant populations from all corners of the world.

As a consequence of this geography and history, East London became poorer, more polluted, less well-connected, more targeted during the war and, consequently, with greater dereliction than the rest of London. De-industrialisation and wider changes to port and maritime industries in the 1960s and 1970s further exposed the narrowness of the East London economy, and a perceived permanent disadvantage set in.

In the early 2000s, people in East London wanted to promote change. They wanted to change the way London works so that the abundance of talent, diversity and ambition in East London could be augmented with the kinds of

institutions, assets, infrastructure and opportunities enjoyed across the whole city.

In the summer of 2012, London hosted the Olympic and Paralympic Games next to Stratford in East London. The people of East London championed the Games. They were the first to propose that the Games be held in the east of the city, not just to improve the area, but rather to redefine London by remaking its east. The 2012 Games gave London the mechanism to reorientate our city.

At the heart of this transformation agenda is Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, conceived not just for the Games but as a lasting urban anchor, on par with the historic transformative legacies of South Kensington and the South Bank.

### Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park: the next chapter

Thirteen years after the Games, Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park is entering a new cycle. Its transition to its ‘legacy mode’ is now almost complete, and it now thrives with world class universities, cultural anchors, design genius, Olympic-standard venues, homes, businesses, amenities and ventures.

Although the park is still in its early life, its evolution can be understood in three distinct cycles:

- **Cycle 1: 2000 to 2012**—Olympic bidding, site assembly, Games delivery and legacy planning.
- **Cycle 2: 2012 to 2024**—Post Games transformation and the arrival of new partners.
- **Cycle 3: 2024 to mid-2030s**—Orchestration of the development cycle, optimisation and maturation.

Cycle three is now beginning, though cycle two is not yet fully complete. This essay focuses on the emerging cycle three—what it needs to be, what it can achieve and how it can work. But first, let’s remember the first two cycles.

### Cycle one, 2000 to 2012: setting the vision, preparing the site and hosting the Games

At the turn of the millennium, East London began to be integrated to a broader vision for London. In 2002, supporting a big idea that gained traction among local community leaders, then mayor Ken Livingstone decided to bid for London to host the Olympics and Paralympic Games.

The six host boroughs (Newham, Hackney, Tower Hamlets, Waltham Forest, Barking & Dagenham and Greenwich) were home to London’s (and indeed the UK’s) most deprived neighbourhoods. The Olympics presented an opportunity to rebalance London’s geography

and economy with a dynamic new metropolitan centre, create economic opportunities and support better lives for residents.

London’s Olympic vision was based on planning simultaneously for distinct phases, ensuring that decisions and investments made for the Games would enable the transformed future and not constrain it. Several agencies were created to drive this process, working alongside the host boroughs.

In April 2012, the London Legacy Development Corporation (LLDC) was created as London’s first mayoral development corporation, with full planning powers and the mission to deliver the legacy transformation, promote regeneration across the park and surrounding neighbourhoods and change the lives of East Londoners.

‘Let’s make sure the Olympics legacy lifts East London from being one of the poorest parts of the country to one that shares fully in the capital’s growth and prosperity.’  
**David Cameron, then prime minister (2010)**

‘I didn’t bid for the Olympics because I wanted three weeks of sport... I bid for the Olympics because it’s the only way to get the billions of pounds out of the government to develop the East End [...] It’s exactly how I plotted it, to ensnare the government to put money into an area it has neglected for 30 years.’  
**Ken Livingstone, Mayor of London (2000–2008)**

‘It was always an imperative to ensure this historic event worked as a positive force for local residents, closing the gap between quality of life in the host boroughs and the rest of London [...]’  
**Boris Johnson, Mayor of London (2008–2016)**

### Cycle two, 2012 to 2024: Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park transformation

After the Games, the park entered a two-year transformation phase, shifting from ‘hosting’ to ‘legacy’ mode. Renamed Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park in honour of HM the Queen, the park reopened in 2013. It soon hosted major international sport events, including the 2015 Rugby World Cup and the 2017 World Athletics Championships. The Olympic stadium re-opened in 2016 as London Stadium, home to West Ham United FC and UK Athletics. New attractions also opened such as Abba Voyage, which has since welcomed more than 3 million visitors.

A flagship initiative is the delivery of £1.1 billion East Bank. University College London and London College of Fashion, part of University of the Arts London, opened new campuses and have since been joined by other world-class cultural institutions such as the V&A, Sadler’s Wells and the BBC.

LLDC acted as a convenor, bringing together and delivering joint programmes and initiatives with the neighbouring boroughs, community anchors and the growing number of businesses and institutions making their home at Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park.

Finally, effective marketing and place-making have made Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park more than a legacy park. It is now a distinctive part of London’s identity: not only a visitor destination but also a place for work, learning and innovation. Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park is becoming a branded experience—a place that enriches.

‘The fantastic regeneration the Olympic Games brought to some of the poorest parts of East London must be continued. This excellent project brings together new housing with a world-class university and museum and has the real prospect of creating a new centre of culture and learning in London.’  
**George Osborne, chancellor of the exchequer (2013)**

‘In the 10 years since the Olympic and Paralympic games, Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park has been at the centre of a vast regeneration project the impact of which has been felt across London and the whole of the UK. Whether through housing, culture, tech or sporting achievement, I am proud that the Olympic legacy continues to shine.’  
**Sadiq Khan, Mayor of London (2022)**

‘London 2012 was the greatest Games ever, and the work to secure the legacy here in East London through an inclusive approach to local people and the development of the East London economy has become a blueprint for every Olympics and Paralympics since.’  
**Sir Peter Hendy CBE, former chair of London Legacy Development Corporation**

‘We see it as a perfect example of the private sector stepping into a public sector-created opportunity.’  
**Gavin Poole, CEO of Here East**

### Cycle three, 2024 to mid-2030s: orchestration and optimisation

Cycle three is beginning. Unlike the 2012 switchover from cycle one to two, after the hosting of the Games, the second and third cycles initially overlap. Several features mark the shift:

- The near completion of the planning phases of Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park and adjacent sites for future development
- The return of planning powers to the boroughs, and a tighter geographical definition of the park
- The continuation of LLDC to secure the final developments and to shift fully and primarily into the longer-term role of park custodian
- Arrival and opening of the full complement of longer-term anchors and institutions, and the transition to operational maturity and optimisation of key districts and quarters
- A long-term desire to drive Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park towards a self-sustaining financial position, with limited, if any, reliance on the public purse for day-to-day operation
- The growth of the name Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park as a strong destination and experience brand, and the key name of the place and its community.



The character of cycle three

If cycle one was about regeneration and cycle two about convergence, cycle three might be seen to be about excellence. Cycle one was about the Olympics, cycle two was legacy and cycle three is optimisation. The first years of cycle three have seven initial imperatives:

- Complete the build-out of the park (complete cycle two) and attract the infrastructure investment (such as Stratford station) required to operate it at full capacity
- Optimise the range of world-leading institutions now in the park through a Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park alliance
- Maintain the high quality of place and high standards of sustainability
- Drive the competitive edges of Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park as the locus for high value and pioneering activity
- Deepen the commitment to community benefit and empowerment through an inclusive growth strategic framework and a series of investible propositions focused on key areas such as inclusive talent programmes and circular economy activity
- Initiate a brand alliance to build a confident identity and story
- Develop a revised organisational form and revenue models to be able to sustain the high-investment, high-return equilibrium that drove the first two cycles.

Opportunities in cycle three: value proposition

Contributing positively to London’s Growth Plan and the wider agenda of London’s future economy is an important opportunity for Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, to which the park and its partners can bring a significant value proposition. The park concentrates and reflects London’s greatest strengths, and reflects the dynamism and deep character of London including:

- The power of reinvention and confidence with change
- Openness to the world and its communities
- Dynamic diversity and the creativity it brings and fosters
- Pioneering new approaches, building new markets, leading and codifying new trends
- Bringing the conditions, markets and frameworks for scalability.

These have been the hallmarks of London’s success for 500 years. Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park embodies them. It also brings unique location factors that can optimise its contribution to London’s next cycle of success:

- Talent: the people and communities of East London bring youth, diversity, aspiration and global connections, and edge towards the future
- Power: the combined scale, power and prestige of the park partners including world-leading scientific, cultural, design, technological and enterprise institutions
- Quality and sustainability: the high quality of the park, its design, amenities and sustainability
- Connections: continuously improving connectivity within London and beyond
- Reach: the park’s global audience established in cycles one and two is growing rapidly
- Pioneer: the ability to fertilise the park as a testbed, incubator, urban laboratory and experimental zone to trial new technologies, applications and platforms, with the

partners. The park is itself an innovation, and it can host and curate innovation in multiple domains

- Scale and value venturing: the translational capabilities of the partners and their appetites to translate ideas and concepts into products, applications and experience.
- Agility: Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park and partners are on a journey together with a shared appetite for reinvention and ignition. There is confidence to adapt and organise around opportunity
- Combinations: the distinctive combinations of residential with destination, experience economy with innovation economy, sport with culture and retail with education, providing a hyper concentration of urban characteristics in one place producing almost infinite opportunities for accelerated creatively and co-benefits
- Leadership and values: the leadership of the mayor and the ownership of the park by Londoners for Londoners. The partnership of the four London boroughs and the seasoned collaboration that have with and for the park. The long-term commitment to inclusion, participation and common endeavour.

With a value proposition such as this, Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park is set to become a significant location in London’s emerging future. As the legacy mode of cycle two gives way to the optimisation mode of cycle three, the reverberations of the glorious days of the summer of 2012 can ignite and inspire Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park and partners to new feats of aspiration and achievement. ●

‘There needs to be a mechanism which ties the major Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park players together in some way. It’s currently based very much on relationships, goodwill, mutual respect and recognition. But that’s not necessarily an effective basis for ensuring the successful development and activation of an evolving Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park over the next decade.’  
**Shaun Dawson, chief executive, Lee Valley Regional Park Authority (2022)**

‘East Bank brings together culture, arts, education and inspiration and this bold investment will transform the lives of so many for generations to come. But legacy doesn’t end when the buildings open [...] The real legacy of East Bank will be the world’s future artists, creators, innovators and pioneers who will come from East London.’  
**Justine Simons OBE, deputy mayor for culture and the creative industries**

‘We will best seize this next moment by crafting creative relationships between East London communities and Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park’s world-class institutions and businesses. Not top-down, not bottom-up, but inside-out. The to-and-fro of energy and ideas across the thresholds of Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park’s institutions; a reciprocity and a mutuality that will change them and change communities.’  
**Paul Brickell, former executive director of regeneration and community partnerships, LLDC**



New Newham—the Carpenters Estate

Populo Living has been masterminding a series of temporary interventions to deliver now for the Carpenters Estate’s local communities whilst it builds ‘sustainable futures’. Advised by Meanwhile Space, the organisation has devised a series of community-led meanwhile uses on the Newham estate between Stratford High Street and the Olympic Park in anticipation of 2,152 new, refurbished and replacement homes being delivered over 15 years. These include play areas, murals and trails, exercise equipment, community growing and nature spaces, a mixed use work, events and food-and drink space, and a cafe in a 1970s train carriage as a fun gateway into the site, and training ground for new local baristas. The scheme has involved ‘genuine co-design’, said Populo Living project director Nick Clough. ‘Genuine co-design is where it actually gets embedded into the masterplan and you can demonstrate you’ve listened to people and also you’ve demonstrated when you’ve gone against what planners or designers might normally do, to do something different’.



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## 10 STEPS TO BETTER PLANNING

*John Walker of CT Group—and former Westminster director of planning—argues that standards need to be raised at officer and member level—and presents his own 10-point plan*

One of the main pillars of the planning system since its inception has been to ensure elected members have the final say on contentious planning applications. This democracy is under threat as the government considers removing trivial applications from planning committees. However, what is considered trivial by central government may not be the case at a local level, and this may pile more pressure on the chief planner. While the government plans to empower locally elected mayors to determine the big stuff, local planning committees are looking decidedly irrelevant. CT polling last year revealed that communities want decisions to be made by their local councillors, with only 10 per cent agreeing to decisions by locally elected mayors, and only four per cent by government ministers.

Of course, planning committees do need 'modernising', with training at the top of the agenda. Too many councillors speak on non-planning matters, while officers sit back and let them do it. Very few councillors read the planning reports produced by officers. Public speaking at committees is too focused on

objectors who make passionate 'this will destroy our lives' speeches which councillors find too hard to ignore. The standard of presentations from officers has also gone downhill since COVID—how officers can engage with a room full of councillors by presenting the case online from their homes is beyond me. Many councils have adopted standard delegated reports with tick-boxes, and some have decided officers do not need to visit the application site, principally because they want to work from home. No wonder the next generation of planners are struggling—there isn't anyone of experience around the office to ask those difficult questions. So, they guess!

For most applications, it is essential officers carry out site visits and engage directly with the applicant and any objectors. You can't do development management permanently perched behind a desk at home. There are heaps of neighbours equally disillusioned by a planning system where officers refuse to go on site and explain to them why they can or cannot uphold their objection. To improve matters, I put forward this 10-point plan:

1. Planning officers must work from the office at least four days a week.
2. Planning officers must carry out a site visit and not rely on out-of-date internet images.
3. Planning committees must be presented in person by officers—not online from home.
4. Major applications should be determined at cabinet level.
5. Other applications should be determined by committees of no more than five members.
6. Ward councillors must stand down for applications in their ward.
7. Compulsory training with annual refreshers.
8. Guidance on how officers should present applications—actually present the scheme and cover all the main objections in the presentation so members have a better grasp of the facts.
9. Get rid of public speaking. It's too biased in favour of the objector and takes up too much time.
10. If overturning an officer recommendation, each councillor must give a reason for voting against it instead of the current practice of voting it down then collectively trying to find a reason for refusal. ●



Walker—training is key for the next generation of planners



# SHAPING OUR ‘NEW’ NEW TOWNS

*David Taylor meets Arup director Sowmya Parathasarathy to discuss some of the current thinking on the New Towns Taskforce she sits on and what’s on her drawing board globally*

**David Taylor:** Hello, Sowmya. How are you doing?

**Sowmya Parathasarathy:** I’m very well, thank you David.

**DT:** Good! I wanted to ask you, principally, about your work on the New Towns Task Force, but before we do that, I wondered if we could just have a quick chat about what you’re doing at Arup currently. What’s on the drawing board, as it were, at the moment for you?

**SP:** So, my role at Arup is that I’m a fellow and director of urban design and masterplanning. I primarily work with an integrated planning team—a planning and design team that’s based out of London. But of course, we have teams in many other countries in the world, and I lead complex, multidisciplinary masterplanning projects, quite a lot in the UK, but also in other parts of the world. I also have a role in Arup where I lead our work in emerging markets, particularly India, the Middle East and Africa. What we do is sustainable urban development and masterplanning, bringing together a number of disciplines, with all the usual outcomes, something that our clients all over the world, really, find very useful, particularly in our current world of needing to be climate resilient. This might include some New Towns and larger new greenfield developments, but a lot of it includes transformation of our existing cities and places to make them denser, more walkable, more resilient and more sustainable.

Some of the projects in the UK that I’ve worked on over the past few years have included the London Olympic legacy masterplan and the masterplan for the Battersea Power Station development. I worked on a project for the Wellcome Trust just south of Cambridge, which is to expand on the research institute it has there, bringing in other uses, including housing. I’m also doing similar kinds of scales of work in other parts of the world. I’m currently working in Morocco, for example, to develop a sort of energy ecosystem, and what that means in terms of all the urban development that needs to go with it in southern Morocco, and projects in Mumbai, India, for example. So that is an example of the geographic scale and types of projects that I’m involved in.

**DT:** So, you have a very global view on development. How would you say London is currently faring in terms

of its development scene? If you were to take a sort of temperature test of London, vis a vis all those other places around the world that you’re working at, how would you characterise that?

**SP:** One of my London projects is the strategic plan for Thamesmead waterfront, between Thamesmead, Olympic Park, Battersea and so on. One of the advantages London has is that it has a very strong existing network of basic infrastructure, be that transport or energy or the planning system, for that matter. That is a huge plus point. With some of the projects in other parts of the world that I work on, you have to start developing the infrastructure from scratch in some way. So, in London, the big difference is, you have the opportunity to build on what’s already there. But I think it takes quite a long time in London to get things through planning and all the various other hoops that we get. It’s something that we’ve all been talking a lot about. How do you make things quicker? How do you have better ways to fund innovative types of infrastructure? How do you move beyond ‘business-as-usual’ and our existing regulations, to do things better? A simple example: places in Europe seem to be able to build new housing typologies with new materials, or innovations that really promote decarbonisation, much better than we do in London. So, I think one of the things that I bring to the table is an open-mindedness to learning from other cities and places. I mean, we have our own strengths here. But I think learning from some of these other places in Europe and other parts of the world could be beneficial to how we do things in London.

**DT:** And also, presumably, to the New Towns movement that you’re involved with, with your work on the task force. Could you—obviously, without going into too much detail about it, because it’s going to report again, isn’t it—just let us know a little of the work and the scope of the work that you’ve been involved with there?

**SP:** Yes. As you know, the government has set up a New Towns Task Force, of which I’m a member. And the remit of the task force is really to advise government on what the new New Towns programme might look like. Obviously, one of the key limitations that we are seeing in the UK is that we are just not able to build enough housing to meet the demand, and we’re



‘Housing is absolutely limiting labour mobility in the UK’ — Sowmya Parathasarathy

not able to build enough of the kinds of housing—diverse types of housing—to meet demand. And in some of the ‘hot’ places in the UK, particularly in London and the Southeast, we have serious problems around affordability. So, one of the main aims of the New Towns Task Force is to identify places where we can build, at pace and at scale, the kinds of the diverse types of housing that we need.

It’s not just a housing numbers game. It’s very much tied in with economic development. So, I mean, housing is absolutely limiting labour mobility in the UK. We don’t have good quality housing. The existing stock is worsening public health. It’s disrupting education, and we all know, children stay with their parents far too long, and so it’s delaying

family formation. And all of this is having a consequence on economic development. So, I think these are the two-pronged aims of the task force: to identify New Towns where we can think from scratch on building diverse types of housing and having a positive impact on economic development; and the opportunity that comes from being planned from scratch. Even if they are urban extensions or greenfield, they’ll be planned from scratch. So, there’s an ability to think and align better with the strategic infrastructure that’s needed—be that transport or energy and water and waste provision—a different approach to perhaps higher density, more walkable communities, a different approach to providing amenities and social infrastructure. Not after the housing is built, but maybe



while, or even before, the housing is built, so they become attractive places for people to move into. So, I think New Towns are not just about providing housing, which we will need to do in our existing towns' infill sites and brownfield sites anyway. And probably the housing that we built there will be greater in overall numbers. But I think the New Towns programme is an opportunity to really rethink what places for the future would be like, and to do it in a joined-up way.

**DT: To what degree is the general thrust towards settlement extensions rather than greenfield new build? Are you able to even characterise that from the discussions that have been had so far?**

**SP:** Yes, I can. In fact, the definition of a New Town, you know, when the task force was set up, we had quite a slender remit. It was that New Towns would be places where you can at least put 10,000 homes. So, large. But I think since then we've been discussing what types would these be? What is the definition of a New Town? And certainly, one of them would be standalone greenfield sites in the right locations. I mean, Milton Keynes is an example of a standalone greenfield site at the time that it was designated, and it has had the opportunity to really grow and be very successful. It's 300,000 people now. But we've also been talking about significant urban extensions, most definitely falling into the category of possible New Towns. We've talked about whether there could be New Towns within existing towns, in places where there's an opportunity to really have that scale. That's one of the challenges. But some of the largest cities might actually have urban sites that might qualify, in terms of scale, to be designated New Towns. We've also been looking at existing New Towns and seeing if there's an opportunity to grow them even further, or renew them in some ways. So, there's quite a vast range of types that could be New Towns.

As you know, we had a call for sites in December, and we received about 100 submissions from various sponsors, both public and private, and a majority of them were actually urban extensions. But there were some greenfield sites, and they were distributed around the country. So, we are most certainly looking at both urban extensions and greenfield towns. It has to fulfil a number of criteria that we've been working on. The advantage, I guess, of urban extensions would be there's already a little bit of a framework of infrastructure you can build off. So, they have the advantage of maybe getting off the ground faster than greenfield developments would.

**DT: And thus, are considered more sustainable solutions, essentially...**

**SP:** More sustainable, yes. Potentially more viable as well. So yes, I mean urban extensions would quite likely be in the mix.

**DT: What's next for the task force?**

**SP:** We're about halfway through, and what we've been working on so far is expanding our definition of New Towns, working on some placemaking principles, developing criteria for how to select the locations and places, and obviously doing quite a lot of engagement with the wider industry, both the public sector and various professional bodies, individuals who have expertise. And, going forward, I think we are very much now down to testing the viability of whatever we want in the New Towns, including a significant proportion of affordable

housing and social housing, for example. We've now got the criteria. We've got a number of sites we are evaluating, so we'll be doing that, and we are also strengthening and refining the placemaking principles.

Where do we want to set ambitious criteria, perhaps more ambitious than in other places? We're testing how we might be able to deliver that and also looking at funding and delivery models, learning from past examples, and seeing where we might need to strengthen legislation or policy and methodologies to actually deliver these places over time. So, it's quite broad-based still, and in the summer of this year we will complete our final report, which we will submit to government, which will have the identified places and some recommendations on how we might be able to fund and deliver this. And with government, because I think that's an important piece.

## 'The New Towns programme is an opportunity to really rethink what places for the future would be like, and to do it in a joined-up way'

**DT: Final question. I presume you are, then, fairly optimistic about the contribution that this particular movement can make to the 1.5 million homes target?**

**SP:** The 1.5 million homes is a target for this parliament, and a lot of that responsibility lies with the combined authorities, the boroughs and the local authorities, to allocate the land. And to be able to find delivery partners to get that off the ground. So that's for this parliament. Now, I think New Towns, possibly some of the New Towns, might be able to start by the end of this parliament. But, as discussed before, perhaps some of the urban extensions might be able to get off the ground sooner rather than later. While it might contribute to the 1.5 million, I mean, there'll certainly be an overlap, the expectation is that we are setting ourselves to at-pace delivery, even beyond this parliament.

I think the point of all the recommendations we are making is to bring more actors to the table in terms of who builds, so we'll be able to build different types of homes, not just the typical models that are currently being delivered. And so, in the longer term, I think it will play a huge role in enabling different kinds of types and tenures of homes to be built at a pace. So, while it might have some contribution to the 1.5 million, it's a slightly longer-term play.

**DT: Sure. Well, thank you very much for outlining your work, and good luck both with your work at Arup and with the New Towns Task Force. Thanks for speaking to me.**

**SP:** Okay. Thank you very much, David. Bye! ●



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A voice in the City—Whispers, a new public sculpture by Oskar Zieta, part of the London Festival of Architecture 2025

# VOICE RECOGNITION

*Eliza Grosvenor*, head of programme at London Festival of Architecture, looks at how this year's LFA is making space for under-represented voices



What does a post-anniversary festival programme look like? One that puts into action the 'reimagined' ways of creating, making and using the city explored the previous year?

For us, it means firstly looking at where we stand as an industry, what has and hasn't changed in the last year—and why. And secondly, it means holding a lens up to the continued turbulence in which we find ourselves, in London and in the world, and

celebrating underrepresented voices while challenging existing norms and systems.

From the release of the Grenfell report a week before choosing the 2026 theme to global atrocities that have continued across the world—devaluing both people and their environments—the need to centre human experience became undeniable. The LFA2025 theme of 'voices' has become a call to action, shifting conversations towards questions such as: Which voices are underrepresented and needs underserved? Which are missing in our public

FROM THE TEAM

spaces and industry? Which systems are outdated and need rethinking to allow for a variety of human experiences?

LFA is a people-led festival, created for and by Londoners. Our hope for this year's programme is that it once again acts as a catalyst for everyone to find both their entry point into these conversations and the actions to take forward once June has come to a close. This could from a number of options:

- The expanded number of workshops for 2025, such as 'From Voices to Action: Engagement That Works from our Art Park', Harrow Neighbourhood programme or 'Reimagining Disability in Gaza' with Dis Collective, Chisenhale Gallery, Gaza Sunbirds and the University of Westminster
- The exhibitions and installations creating space for under-represented stories and needs, such as Transport for London's 'A Bus Shelter For All' intervention or the LFA takeover at the Now Gallery, with Black Females in Architecture, Just City Working Group Kenya, Citizen Architects and Somali Architecture.
- The tours and performances unveiling new layers of experience and understanding of familiar areas such as 'Sikh Voices at Hampton Court Palace' with A little History of the Sikhs or 'Voices of Rising Green' from our Wood Green and Alexandra Palace neighbourhood programme.
- Talks and lates unpacking the deep systemic changes needed, such as 'Making Space: Histories of Architecture and Motherhood' with the University for the Creative Arts and Zaha Hadid Foundation, or 'Thresholds and Borders' tour by Narrative Practice as part of the Studio Lates programme.

The programme once again aims to remove barriers that often prevent people from participating in these conversations, whether that be physical or language barriers or more invisible forms of exclusion. Many of these questions aren't new, and are recognised by the industry as essential, yet often the steps needed to realise these ambitions often fall short.

Since announcing the theme, the urgency for collective action has continued to rise—whether this links to decisions in the UK around the rights of trans and queer people or trends across the pond towards exclusion, which have already led to increased instances of harmful rhetoric, exclusionary practices, and censorship around identity and belonging.

To echo our 2026 theme essay, architecture must not only be about creation but also about listening, amplifying, and weaving together the diverse voices that shape our spaces, our stories, and our neighbourhoods. At a time when diverse perspectives are both vital and vulnerable, we must explore how these voices can complement, challenge, and evolve alongside one another.

The festival may be temporary, but the impact is long-lasting. It's a moment to celebrate, challenge, connect and most importantly, take action. Whether using the curated collections, maps or filters, find your entry point to the 400+ activities taking place across the city throughout June. ●

View the programme at [londonfestivalofarchitecture.org/programme](https://londonfestivalofarchitecture.org/programme)



Luke O'Donovan; Kes-Tchaas Eccleston

The programme this summer includes 'Sikh Voices at Hampton Court Palace' with 'A little History of the Sikhs'



# KEEPING IT LOCAL

Spencer Lu meets Barnet resident, architect and designer Adrienne Lau to talk about the ‘ripple effect’ impact of her projects in the borough



Barnet has been a partnering destination with the London Festival of Architecture for three consecutive years. And it is a borough that is known to be green, family-friendly and home to many emerging creative networks. These qualities were clear to see as I walked from West Finchley station on a sunny spring day to meet Adrienne Lau, architect, designer, Barnet resident and mentor for LFA2025. A senior associate and project leader at Heatherwick Studios, Lau spends much of her free time working on personal projects under Adrienne Lau Projects and with Edgy Collective, which she co-founded alongside other Barnet-based creatives, Daniella Levene and Leila Taheri.

‘I’m trying to make some small propositions that hopefully give ripple effects,’ she says.

Lau’s projects span a large area across the borough, often aiming to improve the public realm and champion principles of reuse. The hyperlocal approach to her practice comes from a place of curiosity. ‘It’s a bit of a personal experiment,’ she says. ‘During COVID I got to spend more time in Barnet because I live here, and with more working from home and opportunities to observe the local environment a bit more, I started wondering about architects and designers consciously studying the spatial and community dynamics of where they live.’ Lau explains how this was developed outside her role working for a larger international architecture practice. ‘The whole profession is set up so that you’re always like an outsider going into a situation. It’s always a new context, a new client. I guess I was quite interested in whether there’s an opportunity to reverse that and start from our own observation.’



Making waves—Adrienne Lau

One such observation was of the empty public spaces and properties in Lau’s neighbourhood, something which is relatable across all of London. This was the foundation for Lau’s Tramshed project. The proposal aimed to transform an unused engine room in Montrose Park into a satellite location for Artsdepot, a Barnet-based art centre and creative hub. ‘We thought how this side of the borough lacks art and cultural infrastructure. Wouldn’t it be good if the community could reclaim disused spaces for cultural purposes?’

The project is still pending approval from the council, but Lau still hopes that it will be picked up again one day. ‘Sometimes with these self-initiative projects, you don’t really know where it will end up. If it stalls for now, it might come back in the future. It might lead to other things. It’s quite rare that we could achieve something once we set it out. The journey is quite, uh, meandering.’

## Fostering cultural spaces in outer London

Today we decided to meet at Artsdepot’s main location in North Finchley, where Lau has been involved with a few initiatives over the years. Most recently she ran a community consultation workshop, called Bland Design!, for LFA2024 which explored how the space’s exterior could be made more

visible and approachable. Completed in 2004, the art centre is located within a larger, multi-use building. ‘This is quite a strange building,’ she says. ‘It’s like a 3D puzzle, so you’ve got this Artsdepot space here and you’ve got the residential tower, just sitting on top. And then a bus depot as part of the block.’

Within this very multifunctional space, the presence of Artsdepot is obscured. Her workshop explored options of incorporating elements like murals, natural features, improved wayfinding, and comfortable outside seating with the local



Barnet’s Artsdepot project—‘a creative home for everyone’

community. It was, she says, about what sort of environment they would like to see. ‘We didn’t just look at the facade of the building, but also the street outside, and how it is such a wind corridor and always shaded. All these could inform how Artsdepot might create a more welcoming public experience going forward.’

Lau’s relationship with Artsdepot will continue after the community engagement day. The creatives also know the interior architecture department of Middlesex University, which decided to use Artsdepot and the surrounding environment for their site this year. Lau is also mentoring an architecture graduate who’s doing her placement at the artsdepot.

As an accessible public art centre, Artsdepot represents a larger goal within the outer-London borough to nurture the local network of young and emerging creative communities. Lau is a part of Barnet’s cultural strategy steering group which is setting out a plan for the borough’s cultural development, something which Lau feels is crucial to the growth of Barnet. ‘It’s lacking arts and cultural spaces. You know, spaces for exhibition, community workshop events, stuff like that.’

On this point, she identifies space for artists to practise, as well as venues, to be of great importance. When asked about her cultural wish list for Barnet, she responds: ‘I always would love to have an open-access maker space, workshop, not super advanced machinery, but you know, at least a few things.’ Although a nice idea, she believes that there are challenges to this. ‘I think that they struggle to exist because they would need to afford the rent and

maybe charge membership for people to use it,’ she says. ‘So, it needs to be supported initially, I think, by the council or private developer. Otherwise, it’s hard for private individuals to do it themselves from the get-go.’

One successful example Lau recalls of a place like this is Bloqs in Edmonton. ‘Bloqs is this social enterprise workshop space. It’s not cheap to use, but people still use it because if it’s available, people can bring jobs in. Then from the jobs they have the budget to rent the space and the tools and everything. So, there’s at least this makers’ economy. There’s a model that’s proven achievable in another part of London. They also have a café with a community space—it’s bringing different types of economy into a borough.’

## Collaborative experimentation outside

Lau also partnered with the Colindale Community Garden, just down the road from London’s Royal Air Force Museum on the site of Trinity Church. Formerly used as a meanwhile space, the garden is now being cleared out as it will soon become flats. ‘The land belonged to the council, and it was leased to the church. I think it was always known that that piece of land would be eventually developed.’ Here Lau experimented with her skills as a designer to help with the garden’s initiative to provide year-round fresh produce for the Colindale food bank and enhance the garden’s communal space.

The Hanging Garden tested out a new vertical food growing design by suspending a row of pots in the garden’s polytunnel. Agretti was grown from the top while tomatoes and chilli seedlings were planted on the bottom of the pot to maximise space. The design provided shade and used a variety



The Colindale Community Garden, which grows food for a local food bank





Many hands...The Green our Neighbourhood planters from Barnet's All Saints school



'Let's meet on the edge', the competition-winning scheme to transform three sites in Edgware town centre

of colours to uplift the atmosphere. Similarly, Lash It Out took donated and reused materials to construct a series of bamboo structures including a hammock stand and shelving for the Colindale Community Garden. This was for the community to use, encouraging a social space while improving the garden's functionality.

Although practising as an individual, all of Lau's projects work in collaboration with local community groups. 'The stuff that we did in Colindale Community Garden was I guess more informal experimentation with materials. Like bamboo, reclaimed wood, old windows and, growing food, tests... I wouldn't be able to do it alone. It was done with the community gardens.' Lau's work with there also grew to offer more fruitful opportunities with Daniella Levene, who founded the garden. 'So, all these grassroots, local projects paved the way to more collaborations like Edgy Collective that went beyond just the local area.'

Let's Meet on the Edge was one of the major projects by Edgy Collective which featured in LFA2023. This public realm intervention activated the space around Edgware station through a series of installations created using natural and reclaimed materials. Wayfinding, seating and gateways were integrated into the nearby area, greatly improving the way people interacted with the public space. Influenced by community, historical and spatial research, this project aimed to foster local identity and make Edgware a place that people explore rather than pass through. The project was awarded the community prize at the New London Awards 2024.

As a mentor for LFA this year, Lau produced a toolkit on reuse for any organisers or competition submitters thinking about undertaking an installation project. Among a range of past LFA projects, this guide looks at Let's Meet on the Edge as a case study where Lau used her connections with the Colindale Community Garden to store materials before fabrication and after the installation, when pieces were in the process of being rehomed more permanently. Working within a small team, these logistical steps were key to the success of the project. 'The thing about reuse is the space and storage that one needs to just hold the material until you have the budget and the time to fabricate it. Like there's all this in-between period that you just need to store them somewhere.'

### Building a community's future

Now with her role as LFA mentor wrapping up, Lau is looking forward to working more in a different part of Barnet, with another group called Green Our Neighbourhood, towards the Golders Green, Cricklewood side of the borough. Here, she is working on a project improving the public realm around local schools. 'It's to create pollution-shielding, dynamic, green and immersive entrances to the school. We're doing a lot of landscaping and thinking how to incorporate more interactive elements that children would find stimulating.'

The first stage of this project, called Hi-Vis Nature, has already been installed in future greening locations of Cricklewood in the form of conspicuity (reflective) tape designs applied to planters. This engages students with gardening and tests public reception while meeting the council's roadside visibility and safety standards. Like other projects Lau has done in her community, this collaboration

with Green Our Neighbourhood aims to improve the public realm. 'When we go around, schools are so highly secure that they don't often look inviting. How they design the public realm is very much prioritising certain things like security and avoiding antisocial behaviour. But then by doing that I think they kind of compromised the public realm experience.'

## 'Lau's work is deeply inspired by Barnet and the people in her community'

Lau originally moved to Barnet over a decade ago for its affordability and connectivity, and working locally has allowed her to get to know her home borough better and make differences where she feels it is helpful. 'Rather than feeling frustrated but not knowing why, now I have a much deeper understanding and that means I can decide whether to instigate something in response or accept it because, you know, sometimes you can't change everything.'

Lau's work is deeply inspired by Barnet and the people in her community. Thought of as one of the greenest boroughs in London, it's just bordering the Green Belt, and is historically suburban with pockets of social housing, but has, says Lau, 'been evolving with more urban-minded newcomers'. Lau's care for her borough is clear as she shares her interest in places like the Welsh Harp—considered a site of special scientific interest—and the geography of the local rivers like the Silk Stream. 'I guess I kind of learn from people like Edgy Collective's Daniella and Leila,' she says. 'I get influenced by people I collaborate with. That's why maybe what I do could reflect the local character, because I consciously build local collaborative relationships.'



Edgy in Edgware—the project introduced more permeability and greening



# HEALTHY CITIES ARE WEALTHY CITIES

Heatherwick Studio held a Humanise summit—*Do No Harm*—at its King’s Cross base to investigate the links between architecture and our mental states. *Raluca Racasan* was there



The power of interesting architecture and cities built for the passer-by goes beyond aesthetics to affect our mental and physical wellbeing, which in turn supports healthier places for a better economy.

How often do we think about aesthetics—or how things around us look—when we talk about health, or even the economy? I’d venture to say not very often, and definitely not as often as we should. Through his *Humanise* campaign, book, recent summit, and lectures, Thomas Heatherwick, global designer and founder of Heatherwick Studio, is urging the built environment community to listen and do better. And rightly so.

Our environment affects how we feel, the way we feel affects how we behave, and ultimately, both our mental and physical health. Recent advances in neuroscience and cognitive psychology back this up, and it’s interesting to see how in time we’ve gone from designing buildings that were meant to be a source of pride and iconic landmarks of cities made to last for centuries, to square boxes with no character built cheaply

to use for only a few decades, then tear down and start again. Of course, economy and the accessibility of production has had everything to do with this, and though building quickly and cheaply had its benefits, we lost something vital along the way: human emotion. Buildings are the face of our cities. We live in them, walk past them every day, and can’t avoid them. In a pandemic of boring architecture, where what we see affects how we feel, it’s no wonder most cities are no longer a source of joy. Just think about those places we visit for their incontestable beauty—Rome, Paris, Barcelona—and how they make us feel in return. The truth is, the buildings are one of the main reasons that millions of tourists go back each year and leave feeling happy and uplifted.

‘Too much of the same thing’ under-stimulates our brain. Dr Rui Costa, president and CEO of the Allen Institute, explained the effect of boring buildings on our brains in a chat with Heatherwick at the most recent Humanise summit. Boring ‘sameness’ stops our visual cortex (the area of the cerebral cortex that processes visual information) from responding. As living beings, we need our brains to be engaged, and the current buildings that line our streets are being built without thought or care for the ultimate ‘client’ that cannot escape them and must visually engage with them daily—the passerby. By contrast, in his book, Heatherwick gives the example of Gaudi’s astonishingly imaginative and joyful architecture in Barcelona with its curves, details and creative use of materials, that can keep us discovering something new every time we see it. That is architecture which generates positive emotion in passers-by.

While Gaudi’s shapes might seem a bit much in the modern world, the reality is that in the pursuit of the cheapest and quickest way to build, we often forget that the human brain is drawn to the interesting. Complex patterns in the natural world, and even the discerning gaze of babies, show that complexity is what our brains



Hilary Satchwell, director of Humanise partners Tibbalds, presents a practical toolkit for developers



Thomas Heatherwick takes to the stage

seek. In research correlating infant gaze patterns with adult aesthetic judgement, Professor Anna Franklin—lead of the Sussex Colour Group and the Sussex Baby Lab—discovered that babies’ gaze lingered for longer on visually stimulating buildings with detailing such as arches, columns and towers than plain-looking, modern, flat facades. And yet, what we see daily in most of our cities is the latter.

## ‘Too much of the same thing under-stimulates our brain’

So why wouldn’t we use the opportunity when shaping the world around us to do so in a thoughtful way, that serves us, and how we feel? Ultimately, people who feel better are healthier; healthier people put less pressure on healthcare systems; healthier people can work; healthier people contribute to a healthy economy. It seems like a no-brainer. There is hope. Necessity is the mother of invention and the necessity to build in a much more sustainable way due to the climate emergency has forced the built environment community, and our governance, to pause and think about how we build, and what we leave behind for future generations. New biomaterials, the reuse of what already exists instead of producing new materials and the need to support and encourage biodiversity and rewilding, all contribute to a new aesthetic, that is, by force of context, not the shiny new, glass and grey facade, but more ‘human’ and closer to nature.

Having had enough of our bleak cityscapes, Heatherwick has taken on the mission to bring together bright minds in both the built environment and science,

to raise awareness, help end the pandemic of boring and shape cities that are more interesting, and better for us. A solution offered in Heatherwick’s *Humanise* methodology is to simply think differently. Raise the bar for what is acceptable architecture, and start incorporating small details, especially at street and door levels, that make a big difference: an arch, a play on textures, or more interesting colours. Details that don’t affect budgets or timeliness can generate a more positive experience for the passer-by. In his book, and discussed at

the most recent Humanise summit, he outlines three ways to shift our thinking to make better buildings. ‘Accept that how users feel about a building is a critical part of its function; design buildings with the hope and expectation that they’ll last 1,000 years; and concentrate a building’s interesting qualities at the two-metre door distance,’ he explains.

It’s highly unlikely that an architectural revolution will happen overnight. The most powerful message here is one of responsibility and accepting that what we build today deeply impacts the planet, how we feel and how future generations will feel. The time is now to take one step at a time, be that from an architect’s perspective, a developer’s or a borough’s, or simply the voices of communities demanding better, to shift the dial and make the right choice for the long-term health and wealth of our cities and people. ●

Further reading: *Humanise, A Maker’s Guide to Building Our World*, by Thomas Heatherwick; *Healing Spaces, The Science of Place and Well-Being*, by Esther M. Sternberg, MD



The summit included speakers such as TV’s George Clarke and content creator Noris Obijaku





# CONSTANT TRAILBLAZING

Expedition Engineering's 25th anniversary marks an era of shaking up the norm, and a continuous pursuit for good. By *Raluca Racasan*

Trailblazing a new path takes courage, hard work and a bit of luck. It's what Chris Wise, director and co-founder of Expedition Engineering (now in its 25th year), set out to do when deciding to turn the page and move on from Arup.

'I was really lucky, working on all the projects by Norman Foster and Richard Rogers, with an amazing team of engineers,' says Wise. 'It's very unusual for an engineer to be exposed, face-to-face, to some of the greatest architectural designers. The way that they thought and the way that they collaborated was like a university education, like a sort of master's level. And I had it for about 10 or 15 years with those two. So, without realising it, I learned loads of stuff which other people didn't know or couldn't do, or even if they could do it, they hadn't actually done it on real projects. And so, I had a sort of accidental confidence that I personally would be able to handle most things that people would throw at me. I'm very grateful to Norman Foster and Richard Rogers and their practices for providing that education. It was fantastic.'

Why, then, leave and face a conservative industry (almost) on his own?

'To be honest, it became a little bit too easy,' he says. 'I felt people were accepting what I was saying without challenging it, as if it were absolutely true. I wasn't comfortable being treated so seriously.' Change was afoot, as was a desire to take on a new challenge where they were forced to sink or swim, hoping growth and opportunity would follow. 'I wanted to get to a place where there was more exposure and not so much of a safety net, in the hope that it would force the next step so that we would be having to respond to whatever challenge was thrown at us because that might be a way of developing ourselves', explains Wise. Richard Rogers' interest in keeping working together was the push to start the practice.

The mission Expedition had on day one still runs through its veins today. 'Its fundamental purpose was to put me in the first instance, and then eventually everybody, into a place where we were forced to respond to challenges in a slightly new way.' Two former Arup colleagues—Chris Smith, who was operations-focused and Sean Walsh on the technical side—joined Wise and his design and solution focus in setting up a small practice to shake things up. 'At the time, we described ourselves as a three-legged stool. Each leg had one key strength, and together we formed an approximately stable piece of furniture!' The trio didn't wait too long before landing a big commission from Hopkins Architects. 'We could then hire people, and could think about getting an office on

the back of this one project,' he recalls. In fact, what made Expedition stand out among the mammoth competition was its entrepreneurial and adventurous nature. 'There weren't that many small practices around. There were a few, but not many. It was unusual, especially at the higher end of the architectural world. The things that we'd hoped would happen, happened. As did some things we hadn't even foreseen on the back of that, so we managed to start building

the business. Richard was very good, giving us projects as well, or at least talking to us about projects.'

Fast-track to today, and the learning that shaped Wise has found its way into Expedition's values. One big step in giving the next generation the opportunity to grow, and effectively take over in the future, nurture new talent and give them a purpose and motivation beyond working for founders, was in 2008 when the company was converted into an employee benefit trust (EBT). 'We decided to give the whole thing away, with all the bank balance and everything, and we (the founders) just became salaried members of staff. It's a very bottom-up way of working. We're one of the very first



Early days: Wise with Sean Walsh and Chris Smith





The Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center in Athens, where Expedition worked with Renzo Piano

built-environment engineering practices to become an EBT, and we created a sort of extreme version. It's an experiment and it's still going. Every year it gets stronger and stronger.'

The Expedition team is still on its path to be a trailblazing force for good to this day, which has enabled them to attract key talent and do groundbreaking work. There is a strong appetite to push boundaries in terms of design too, although in a relatively conservative industry, trying to be more experimental is not straightforward. 'The conclusion I've come to is that it probably is a 20-year play to change the mindset. In the past five years, the lean and regenerative design side of things has really accelerated, which the Institution of Structural Engineers has been fantastic

in embracing. The RIBA as well has been very good. I'd say, those are two of the leading organisations trying to move lean design and regenerative design forward'.

Being a 'trailblazing force for good' would be missing the point if being sustainable and educating others were not part of the equation. The company pledged to reach net zero by 2030, but the expectation is to do much better than that. The goal is to be involved in clients' projects which enable others to minimise their carbon footprint too, and so on, in a chain of sustainability that would impact millions. 'If we're working with a client, and we can't see that we can change their perception of what good looks like in that direction, then we would feel very uncomfortable about it. And then you get into a difficult situation. Do you carry on working with those people and try to change their minds? Or do you forget it, and decide not to work in that space? But somebody else will then do something not so good. So, we're trying to be 'inside the tent', rather than outside. We try to get close and affect change in the best way we can.'

Another aspect of Expedition's trailblazing spirit is being one of the first built-environment practices to become B Corp, certified in 2018. 'Before that we were a registered social enterprise, and were trying to find others which we could, in the nicest possible way, infect them with this similar sort of mindset.'

Looking back on Expedition's 'journey', while the trailblazing spirit remains, Wise believes that the company has evolved massively. Doing 'funky structures for famous architects' is how it all started, and it's still welcome. But now, most of what the team is doing is geared around

scaling their impact. Some of the most rewarding projects to date include the Infinity Bridge in Stockton-on-Tees, where Expedition used all the technology 'tricks' it could to ensure it was as lean as possible, while being a very large structure. 'We're very proud of that because it was a sort of state-of-the-art project,' Wise explains. 'Then we did it again with the Velodrome for the Olympics, which was as lean and as pared-back a project as we could do because we wanted to follow the spirit of the elite cycling mindset. You pare everything down, so you get the optimum performance out of it. That was a good project.'

The award-winning Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center in Athens, which Expedition worked on



Asymmetry in action—the Infinity Bridge in Stockton-on-Tees

with Renzo Piano, is a particular highlight, notably for the ferrocement solar canopy. 'To make that canopy in an earthquake country, it had to be as light as possible. So, it was all made from ferrocement in a pop-up factory at the site. It's amazingly thin and very beautiful. I think 900 pieces were made in that factory, put together to make this 100sqm canopy that sits over the top of the opera house. That was an extreme project, and nobody really knows about it, but we were very proud of it as it ticked most of the technological boxes, most of the social boxes, and most of the decent environmental energy boxes that we could manage, and it was an amazing piece of architecture as well'.

## 'We're trying to reverse that trend of asset-stripping the planet from the natural world'

Talking about these successful projects, Wise brings it all back to the people, which seem to be Expedition's biggest and most cherished asset. 'It's remarkable what people can achieve when you give them space and let them do their thing. It gives me great pleasure to see younger engineers and designers thinking their way through something and just coming up with

a solution where you just go: "Wow, I didn't see that coming!" That's about the best you could possibly hope for as a founder.'

What about the future, then? Even more than the built environment, Wise has a love for the natural world. And if there is something that Expedition as a collective can contribute to when handing down and shaping the built environment today, not as monuments but as non-binding structures that can adapt and respond to the needs of the world in the future, then it will aim to do so. 'I like being a human being on planet Earth. I think it's a nice thing to do, despite all its troubles. I think of us as quite temporary. But what we are doing is we're handing down to the next generation and the next generation, and I want to make that as good as possible... to be generous towards the future, not to close off avenues for people who are coming after us, because we have no idea what they'll need. In particular, not to close off any more avenues in our relationship with the natural world. So, we're trying to reverse that trend of asset-stripping the planet from the natural world by thinking our way through how to do projects in a very lean way, whether we do them at all, or whether we can adapt the ones we already have.'

Twenty-five years on, it's impressive to see how far Expedition has come, and all that it's achieved. But, as Wise points out, trailblazing is an almost impossible task, which is never complete. It keeps the company and its collective of people growing and learning, which is why it's worth pursuing. And so, the good works go on, we hope for another 25 years and more... ●



# HEALING THROUGH DESIGN

White Arkitekter associate director *Lienelle Geldenhuys* argues for a whole-child approach to healthcare architecture



I've long believed that buildings have a profound role to play in healing, not just supporting clinical care but actively promoting wellbeing. That belief has been central to our design for Cambridge Children's Hospital (CCH).

As architects working in healthcare, many of us are familiar with Roger Ulrich's seminal research on the role of nature, daylight and views in improving patient outcomes. Designing buildings that allow in natural light and offer contact with nature should now be considered a baseline, not a bonus. At CCH we set out to go further.

Our design supports a truly integrated model of care that combines physical and mental health services for children and young people under one roof. This pioneering vision from our client –Cambridge University Hospitals, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough NHS Foundation Trust, and the University of Cambridge—called for more than just a well-lit and efficient hospital. It demanded an environment that actively supports children's whole lives: their bodies, minds, emotions and identities.

To meet this ambition, we drew on not only established evidence-based design principles but also a growing body of child-centred research into how young people experience healthcare environments. The results were striking. Studies have shown, for example, that biophilic design can significantly increase visual attention and mental focus in preschoolers, and that using wood in interiors, even in school settings, can lower children's stress and improve their engagement.

Other studies highlight how light, colour and space matter to children. During our patient engagement workshops, the children described their ideal hospital as warm, bright, cheerful, colourful and imaginative, a place that feels spacious, not confined. We responded to these insights by designing a calm, contemporary setting that avoids clinical austerity. The building is broken into a series of volumes around gardens and courtyards, with plenty of access to daylight and outdoor spaces. This ensures even the most vulnerable children, those spending long periods as inpatients, have opportunities to get outside and experience fresh air, seasonal change and the natural world.

Play is another essential theme. As shown in research from Norway and Canada, play enhances children's wellbeing, creativity and social development, while access to outdoor play reduces stress and supports emotional regulation. We've designed flexible, welcoming spaces for play both indoors and out, places where children can feel like themselves, not just patients.

Importantly, the hospital also needs to feel safe. Studies show that dignity, privacy and self-control are critical to a child's healthcare experience. These were also recurring themes during the design process and informed our approach to space planning, location of entrances and shared family areas, ensuring that CCH supports not just treatment but also a sense of agency and security.

## 'Architecture can transcend traditional boundaries, fostering environments that heal, inspire and empower'

Our interior strategy extends this thinking, using natural materials with low carbon footprints to support both human and planetary health. Warm timber finishes and tactile surfaces reflect the 'home-from-home' aspirations that many families express, while also delivering on biophilic principles.

Cambridge Children's Hospital stands as a testament to what is possible when design is deeply informed by empathy, evidence and collaboration. By integrating physical and mental healthcare within a single, thoughtfully designed environment we are not only addressing the immediate needs of young patients but also setting a new standard for holistic, child-centric care. This project exemplifies how architecture can transcend traditional boundaries, fostering environments that heal, inspire and empower. ●



Building and healing—White Arkitekter's design for the Cambridge Children's Hospital, set to open in 2028



Interiors use natural materials, with warm timber aiming at a 'home-from-home' feel





# INSPIRING THE CITY BUILDERS

In this special feature we look at skills on the back of NLA's *Skills for Places* report, including the keynote speeches from University College of Estate Management vice chancellor **Ashley Wheaton** and Arup's **Joanna Rowelle**



**Ashley Wheaton**  
Vice Chancellor, UCEM

There's a huge amount of information in this report that we should be frustrated about, but I think it points the way towards the answers in many, many areas. So, I'm really excited to see the launch of this report. I think it represents a really good step forwards in articulating the challenges of developing what I would call a coherent and attractive built environment sector, both for current and for future talent. I'd like to add my thanks as well to the team at NLA. I think you've done a fantastic job. I remember sitting in that room over there a while back, and I suspect you probably wondered what you'd taken on, but you've really made sense of it, and I think you've produced something which is both provocative but equally solution oriented. So, thank you, and very well done.

Our amazing industry is unfortunately held back by being hugely fragmented, difficult to fully understand, and perhaps most frustratingly by appearing to be unattractive to candidates, through a lack of awareness of the incredible breadth and depth and diversity of the roles that are available within it. We simply have to do better than we're doing today. In the report, you'll see the statistics. Sixty-three per cent of school children that were surveyed said they didn't understand what the built environment was. We're losing that talent. We're losing it to other, better-articulated, better-defined and better-understood sectors.

At UCEM, and for those of you who don't know us, we are the largest provider of built environment professional qualifications, with about 4,000 students, of which 2,600 are degree apprentices. We're deeply connected with industry and have relationships with over 700 employers.

I'm absolutely delighted today to be able to announce we have had official confirmation from the regulator and from the department that we can change our name to the University of the Built Environment—and that will happen from June. And that's really important for us, because our vision is to be the centre of excellence for built environment education. That means providing accessible education across of the built environment professions, now and in the future as those professions evolve, with an increasing emphasis on horizontal skills, such as sustainability, digital, new technologies, data... that list goes on and on. There will also be a real focus on trans-disciplinary skills and a far better integration of what we all know as a professionally siloed approach to our built environment.

The approach that's been outlined in this report, in my view, is exactly what we need. It's that improved focus on those three key areas—communication, convening and connecting. I might add a fourth C, because I think they all add up to one word, which is collaboration. That's where we are now. And if we want this to work, we will have to do it together. Doing it alone, doing it in silos, simply isn't going to be sufficient anymore.

I'm just going to step back for a moment, if you don't mind, and look at the national picture. The scale of the issue here is absolutely monumental. According to the Construction Leadership Council, we need 100,000 new workers to come

into the built environment industry every year for the next five years, and that's if we're to meet both the existing and the new ambitions set out by the government, for housebuilding, for infrastructure and for our net zero ambitions. And of course, it forms a key component of the engine room of economic growth and is absolutely in the UK's national interest.

Despite many of those headlines, and despite an understanding of the 100,000 people required, not all of those roles are in typical construction and building trades. In fact, 50 per cent are in professional and technical roles. The challenge, therefore, is enormous, not just in attracting all of those people, but about qualifying them and about getting them effective in projects. Sorry to say it's slightly worse than that, which is that we're already late, noting, of course, that in many professions, the route to becoming fully qualified or chartered can be at least five years or more.

My view is we need to make this wonderful industry—I think the numbers are about 2.6 million people nationally who work across the built environment—we need 14-year-olds and 16-year-olds and 18-year-olds and 25-year-olds to see the vast array of career opportunities and begin their journey. My view is that to achieve that, we need the addition of more generalist entry level programmes, and you'll see that in the report described as an inverted 'T'. It might mean GCSEs or 'A' levels in built environment studies, but whatever we need to provide clear pathways and clear signposting to specialisms which could come later, rather than competing, as we do now, at early stages of a student's journey to enter a particular profession. We need a compelling built-environment attraction campaign which is exciting and coherent.

If you want a great example, just look at what the armed forces have done over the past 15 years. They've come together and presented a uniform and exciting proposition in terms of recruitment. We need to find a way for this industry to genuinely be understood as the built environment, not as construction, as real estate, as surveying, as civil engineering, as architecture, planning and the many other specialist component parts.

Optimistically, I believe that much of what we need is already in place, and if we can really harness the power of schemes like apprenticeships and use the funding streams already available more effectively through a more collaborative approach, I think we can really make a huge and positive difference for our industry.

Now, this sector has some incredible challenges ahead. One-and-a-half million homes in the next four-and-a-bit years, filling in the area between Oxford and Cambridge, new reservoirs, new runways, and, of course, millions of buildings that require retrofitting, added to which we need to do all of that in the race to net zero. There's the adoption of the Building Safety Act, there's the adoption of new technologies, smart buildings, modern methods of construction, and of course, it goes on and on and on.

More than any of that, I sincerely hope that we can do it together with an approach which leads to buildings and places which we and future generations will all be proud of. If we're going to do all of that, and if we're going to do it in a way we feel good about, then we need the best talent we possibly can. And that has to start with presenting a coherent view of the built environment which is appealing to the talent that we want to come into our industry. So, thank you again to the team at NLA. I'm going to hand over to Joanna. Thank you. →





**Joanna Rowelle**  
Business & Markets  
Leader, UKIMEA,  
Arup

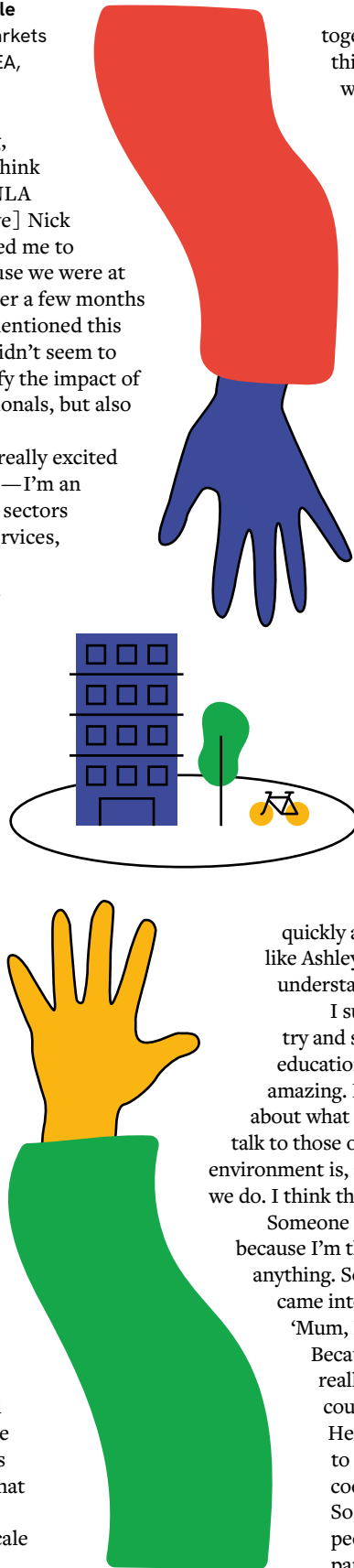
Good evening, everybody. I think the reason [NLA chief executive] Nick McKeogh asked me to speak is because we were at dinner together a few months ago, and he mentioned this

report, and he talked about the fact that we didn't seem to have a way in which we talk about and quantify the impact of the built environment, both for us as professionals, but also for young people. And I got really excited.

I'd only had one glass of wine, but I got really excited because, when I worked at the GLA years ago—I'm an economist—we used to quantify all these big sectors in London. Financial services, professional services, legal services, creative industries. But we'd never looked at the built environment, so I'm really pleased GLA economics are doing that now. One of the things that I read in the report that I thought was really compelling is that London's built environment sector is, collectively, one of the largest employers in the capital, with a GVA contribution equivalent to the financial services and professional services sector put together. That is absolutely staggering. I don't know why as a sector we aren't talking about that more but also inspiring our young people to want to be part of that story a bit more as well.

I lead our business in London, in Arup. We've got about 2,500 people, and the variety of disciplines and outcomes and projects that they deliver inspires me every day. I really think this report will be a great tool for us to talk about how we can inspire others to really understand how we as a collective industry deliver and solve the world's problems together, as much as deliver beautiful spaces. So that's why I love this report.

I was looking again at the three key messages from there and I suppose my call to arms, if you like, from the elements I've read through and really digested is firstly—communicate. I think, as an industry and as a collective, we really need to communicate, defining the scale of what we do, and we just heard some fantastic statistics and stories there about the absolute impact that we have as a built environment. So, let's keep communicating, and let's keep defining the scale of what we do and telling people about it.



We also need convening—we need to come together more and celebrate what we do and think about how we can embed that into what we're delivering around skills, education and young people. I'll get to that in a moment.

And then connect. We need to work together. And I love the fact you just mentioned collaboration, because we can only achieve what we do in the built environment when we collaborate. I don't think there's any project I've worked on in Arup—and I'm sure it's true for most of you in the room—that hasn't had many hands and many partners. It's not all about one thing. What this report means for Arup is that we really want to work with partners and collaborators and help define more what we can do in the sector to deliver the outcomes that we want to see for our young people and beyond.

We really need a diverse workforce. We don't know what the jobs are of the future, and I hear that a lot at the moment, and it terrifies me. I have three children, and people keep saying, oh, in 20 years, 50 per cent of the jobs won't be what they are now, there'll be something else. And I keep thinking, gosh, we need to help define what the 'something else' is. I think it's about adaptability. And I think it's about ensuring as employers as well that when our people join us and want to experience many things we're able to transfer those skills

quickly and effectively, so working with partners like Ashley and his team to ensure that people can understand the diversity of what's on offer.

I suppose my plea, if you like, is I think we should try and speak more about what we do, especially on the education programme Grace and the team deliver—it's amazing. Inspire more, speak to our members more about what we're doing. Speak to young people, go and talk to those out in communities about what the built environment is, and show more. Let's show more about what we do. I think this report is a great way of doing that.

Someone told me I had to end on a real high tonight, because I'm the last speaker, and I couldn't think of anything. So, I thought I'd end on a joke. My 17-year-old came into the kitchen the other day and said to me, 'Mum, I've got this TikTok video. Can I show you it? Because it's about this degree course that looks really cool.' I looked at it, and I said, 'That's the course I teach on, at the college that I advise in.' He was like, 'Oh, really? I've not really listened to anything you said, but TikTok is really cool. I will go and watch a bit more of that.' So, my advice is, if we want to engage young people they are not going to listen to their parents—get them on TikTok. Thank you! ●

# SKILLING THE FUTURE

*Cecilia Lindström and Jack Sallabank of Future Places Studio reflect on their report and how best to encourage a new young built environment workforce*



Our new and seminal piece of research, *Skills for Places*, articulates how we as a built environment community will take responsibility, provide clarity and build trust to support a diverse

range of young people and career changers into a fulfilling career in placemaking.

Increasingly multifaceted and diversifying, the breadth of opportunities in the sector is expanding and today there is a place for thinkers and doers from all walks of life. The built environment is no longer just for traditional core roles in planning, architecture, construction, engineering and surveying, but for new and interdisciplinary jobs spanning smart tech, AI, circular economy and many other fields, unlocking opportunities for young professionals and career changers in pursuit of meaningful work.

London's built environment sector is one of the largest employers in the capital with a GVA contribution equivalent to the financial and professional services sector combined. This makes it large-scale not only in London, but quite possibly the largest and most advanced cluster of built environment businesses anywhere in the world—designing, engineering and constructing the built world across continents.

Its scale and influence are only set to grow as society continues to rapidly urbanise and decarbonise.

Yet, the knowledge of opportunities in the sector is limited. Sixty-three per cent of 13–18-year-olds say they are unfamiliar with the term 'built environment', meaning we are losing many brilliant young people to other so-called 'A grade' careers.

This is rooted in the disjointed nature of how we currently seek to inspire future city-makers into the industry and the narrow pathways that we provide into employment through our equally siloed education, apprenticeship and recruitment ecosystems. The lack of clear understanding within government around the scale and significance of the collective whole—both the existing economy and its future potential—fails to put real political impetus behind supporting the skills, pathways to employment and policy levers that will help the sector grow and flourish.

As the only representative body for the built environment community across the public and private sectors, NLA can play a central role to change this reality. As such, we have identified three key priorities and nine actions that set out how we will work with industry, education providers and decision-makers to inspire the next generation of city makers.



## Communicate

We need to define the scale and breadth of the built environment sector as one whole, and the huge potential it offers for purposeful and profitable careers across a range of skillsets.

We will work together with the industry, education providers and the GLA to define the scale and international significance of London's built environment employment ecosystem.

We will highlight to national, regional and local government the significant role that London's ecosystem has to play in supporting growth, and the need to invest in advancement of skills.

We will raise the profile of the sector and job opportunities within it to the wider public, showcasing the myriad skills and talent in our industry and inspiring future city-makers to consider a career in this sector.







Talent pool—the opening night event at The London Centre

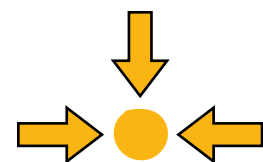
## Convene

We need to come together across industry siloes, education providers and government to better link skills requirements with education subjects, pool funding for further education and apprenticeships, and increase interaction between the industry and the public.

We will convene the industry with educational and charitable organisations to improve the link between future skills requirements and education subjects.

We will work with the government to maximise the impact of further education and apprenticeship funding across sectors.

We will increase our capacity at The London Centre to host young people and those changing career to learn about city-making, enhancing its physical and digital offer, and boosting our offer to charities and educational partners to make use of the space.



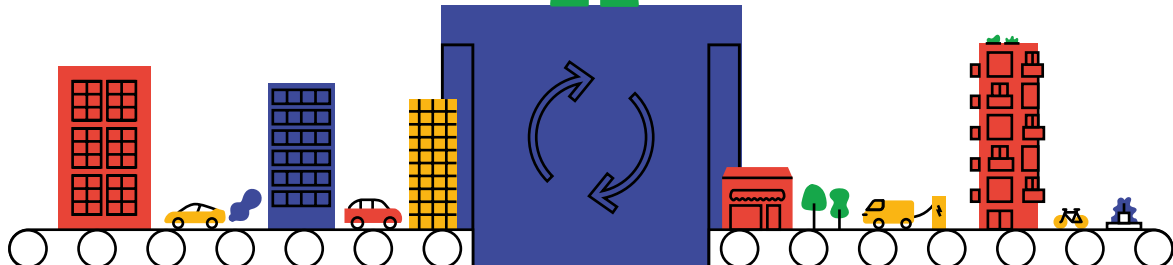
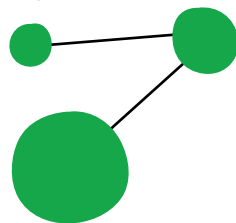
## Connect

We need to ensure that pathways through education and into employment are broad-ranging, inclusive and easy to navigate.

We will signpost to industry work experience programmes, placements, apprenticeships and courses to schools, colleges and charities, creating equitable and accessible routes into built environment roles, with a particular focus on under-represented communities in the capital.

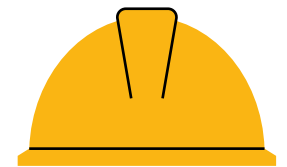
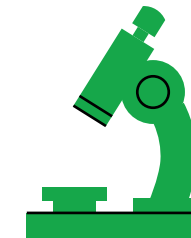
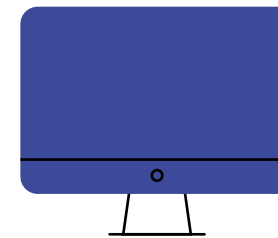
We will co-ordinate with London's government to ensure that pathways to careers in the built environment are supported equally to other key sectors.

We will support future city-makers as they enter the industry, developing their talent via our NextGen network, highlighting emerging leaders through our Diverse Leaders network, and connecting them across wider NLA activities. ●



# FILLING THE GAP, TRANSFORMING LIVES

*Ghislaine Halpenny, director of corporate affairs, people and sustainability at Regal, outlines why her firm is taking real steps to address the skills shortage*



over 10,000 homes, we understand this challenge intimately—and are taking steps to address it.

At the heart of our response is the Regal Academies initiative, a true tripartite partnership between Building Heroes and CONEL (College of Haringey, Enfield and North East London). Together, we are not only filling the skills gap but transforming lives in the process.

Each year, we train around 160 individuals, including military service leavers and local community members. Why? Because the construction industry doesn't just need workers—it needs people with the discipline, resilience, leadership and the team ethic that military veterans bring. At the same time, we believe in empowering local people, giving them access to careers they may not have previously considered.

The programme is built on more than just academic delivery. We provide real-world insights, live site access and industry connections. Our construction teams are active participants, sharing their career journeys and hosting site visits, while teams from other parts of the business can join academy learners in practical, hands-on sessions. These experiences ground classroom learning in real industry context, making the transition to employment smoother and more inspiring.

We are proud to have recently expanded the model with the launch of a Retrofit Academy in Watford, responding to the demand for green skills and sustainable construction. And we're going further still, preparing to launch a more

advanced construction skills course tailored for senior military leavers, supporting progression into supervisory and leadership roles within the sector.

It's not just about technical training. This partnership delivers holistic support. Building Heroes expertly manages the programme, recruits outstanding candidates, and provides critical pastoral care—especially important for veterans who may be navigating difficult personal transitions. CONEL brings academic excellence, through skilled tutors and robust student support systems.

## 'We believe construction is more than just bricks and mortar'

And there are quieter, powerful victories too. Misconceptions about the industry are broken down. Learners often report a renewed sense of purpose, achievement and belonging. We see transformations—not just into skilled workers, but confident, motivated individuals. Some go on to self-employment, others secure roles with our supply chain or even within Regal itself.

This is a model that works. We are not just filling job vacancies, we are building a diverse, skilled and motivated workforce, ready to meet the sector's growing needs. As the housing demand accelerates and sustainability becomes central to construction, we know that people are our most valuable asset. That's why we invest in them today.

At Regal, we believe construction is more than just bricks and mortar. It's about communities, opportunity and progress. Our Regal Academies are a practical response to an urgent industry need—building our workforce for the future. ●



# WHAT SKILLS WILL BE CRITICAL TO THE FUTURE OF THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT SECTORS?



**Peter Barker**  
Partner, Ryder

The built environment faces the same challenges as the rest of our economy in the battle for growth—the climate emergency, socio-economic and political volatility, and skills shortages. But there are other significant hindrances unique to the sector which are stubbornly unresolved, despite many attempts by government and industry bodies over the past quarter century. These include fragmented professional structures, short-termism, disjointed procurement and lack of integration and overcomplexity in our education systems. This is set against a background of accelerating complexity in technology, regulation and process. So, what is the solution?

Green skills, digital competency, and fire and life safety are obviously at the forefront of current thinking, but the often fragmentary and siloed nature of built environment education is a more fundamental barrier to creating the next generation of talent for the industry. The disconnect between practical and academic competencies, particularly in architecture, need fixing. One solution is the development of cross disciplinary rotational apprenticeships such as the award-winning PlanBEE programme and the new level-six degree apprenticeship in design, construction and management. These programmes are led by employers for employers, using work-based learning to equip emerging talent with the knowledge, skills and behaviours necessary to form the professions of the future, establishing a solid understanding of the sector at degree level before specialisation at masters level. This I believe should be the direction of travel for the sector.



**Carol Lynch**  
CEO, Construction  
Youth Trust

Alongside the notable shortage of skilled tradespeople, the built environment sector faces a deficit of construction managers, surveyors and engineers. The opportunity seems clear: invest in apprenticeships and other employer-led pathways and leverage these to attract young talent into the industry, building a viable skills pipeline for the future.

While the industry may still struggle to establish itself as a first-choice career pathway, we are increasingly convinced that if the sector develops a competitive, supportive apprenticeship/learn-and-earn offer, young people will most definitely follow. If we build it, they will come! Learn-and-earn pathways, we believe, can serve as a powerful tool for reducing skills shortages where the sector needs it most—including building services and retrofitting in the green space.

Large construction organisations are much more likely to have an apprenticeship programme, so working together continues to be particularly helpful for smaller companies who are more reluctant to recruit apprentices. Moving forward, as part of the solution to building a viable skills pipeline, we should encourage greater collaboration and mutual support across the industry to transform how we attract, recruit and retain the young people in years to come.



**Damian Fennell**  
Managing director,  
MaxQ Consulting

Global population and urbanisation are both expanding rapidly, placing huge and growing demand on built environment delivery. But at the same time increasing regulation is making it harder to deliver at pace. Digital technology offers a phenomenal opportunity to speed up the journey from business plan to shovels in the ground.

Gaming software platforms were designed to recreate vast, complex world environments, and this has made them uniquely placed to simulate the unbuilt, and help us appraise it faster. But the opportunity goes deeper—we can use game tech to design in a new way, a way learned from software development—rapid prototyping in digital 3D. This way of working requires an old skill—working fast and loosely, unafraid of proposing the ‘wrong’ idea, and making and testing in an unresolved environment. It’s highly creative and communicative but can feel dangerously untidy to the surveyor mindset.

If architects learn to use game engines it reopens the door, digitally, for the use of painting and sculpting, those foundational skills underpinning design. It could also open the AEC design field out to artists and other visual creatives—a talent cohort in desperate need of new professional opportunity who would bring fresh thinking to the table.

We could be looking at a new renaissance for design.



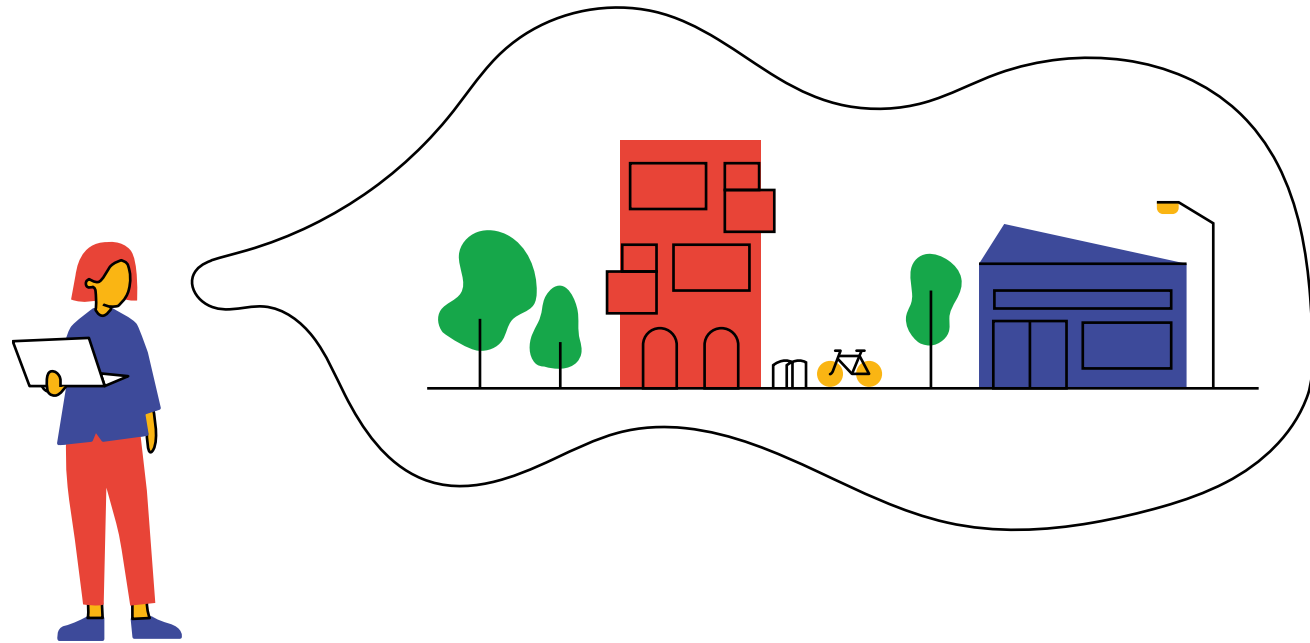
**Charlie Brett**  
Senior architect, LOM

As architecture embraces artificial intelligence, AI literacy will become essential—not replacing architects but empowering them. Future architects will design workflows that integrate AI strategically, potentially improving visualisation for clients across the design process and automating tasks like compliance checking.

Visualisation, once the domain of specialists, is now accessible to anyone with an idea. Prompt but critical analysis is crucial, and future architects can focus on curating and evolving rigorous design ideas, rather than mastering complex software. But AI’s strength is also its weakness: it tends to reinforce trends and can provide convincing design solutions that are not backed up by rigorous thought. Architects must still develop original ideas rooted in human-centric design that questions conventions rather than replicating them. They need to understand how to use AI to do this, as it is essentially a new management skill.

Understanding AI’s technical and legal limitations will be essential. Knowing what not to automate—and when to intervene—will remain a human responsibility. Younger architects may not always recognise when AI outputs need scrutiny. The future of architecture favours those who combine design thinking, ethical awareness and technological fluency. For young professionals, these skills could accelerate meaningful impact. ●





# SURVEYING THE HORIZON: SKILLS FOR A SUSTAINABLE SKYLINE

*Professor Yolande Barnes of UCL argues that while AI has the potential to revolutionise construction, reskilled humans will also come to the fore*



For decades, discussions about skills in London's built environment have predominantly centred on construction and design. The focus has been on the tangible aspects—laying bricks, drafting blueprints, and erecting structures. But, looking towards future decades, it's evident that this narrative needs a significant shift.

The advent of artificial intelligence (AI) and robotics clearly has the potential to revolutionise the construction industry. AI algorithms can analyse and optimise building designs for factors such as energy efficiency, structural stability and cost-effectiveness. They assist in automating repetitive tasks like generating construction documents and performing quality checks, freeing up professionals to focus on higher-level design decisions and creative problem-solving. On construction sites, robotics can increase safety, productivity and efficiency.

While these technologies may render some traditional skills obsolete, they also highlight the enduring importance of human-centric skills. Critical thinking, adaptability and emotional intelligence are most often cited as irreplaceable.

Often overlooked is imagination, tempered by, in the case of the built environment, the act of being human. Cities and buildings are for people, not machines, so the role of end-users is critical. Real estate projects always have a broader social and environmental impact as well as economic, so require nuanced judgments and ethical considerations. The way we prompt machines to do our bidding, as well as what we prompt them to do, will have significant consequences and these are new skills we all must learn. Meanwhile, projects requiring complex relationships, networks and face-to-face communication like co-creation, urban planning and community engagement will continue to rely heavily on human expertise.

Some elements of the built environment industry seem to have been underrepresented in the skills conversation so far, one being surveying, particularly valuation. While the RICS 'red book' guide to valuation may have been digitised, traditional practices are still firmly entrenched in the profession. Automatic valuation models (AVMs) have evolved with the holders and manipulators of big data rather than within the surveying profession. While many valuers (and their financial and banking clients) still rely on traditional valuation methods using past-based comparable yields and

capital values, there's a growing need to shift towards more explicit future net income streams.

Low transaction volumes and slow capital growth are moving investors away from frequent trading of real estate. This trend is impacting capital markets and prompting investors to focus on the ongoing creation of value through active land and building management. In a world where capital value growth is not guaranteed and where frequent trading of assets is costly and unprofitable, value is increasingly generated by active, ongoing asset management instead. The team of people behind an asset become as important, maybe more important, than the asset itself in determining its future value. Traditional valuation methods do not evaluate the quality of management teams. AI will be able to—automatically. I think we can expect algorithms to start identifying the asset management teams, even individuals, which create most value. In 10 years' time, I predict the big salaries are not going to be earned by the capital transaction superstars doing the big deals but by the, hitherto humble, property manager offering the excellent building and customer service that maximises revenue for investors.

## 'Cities and buildings are for people, not machines'

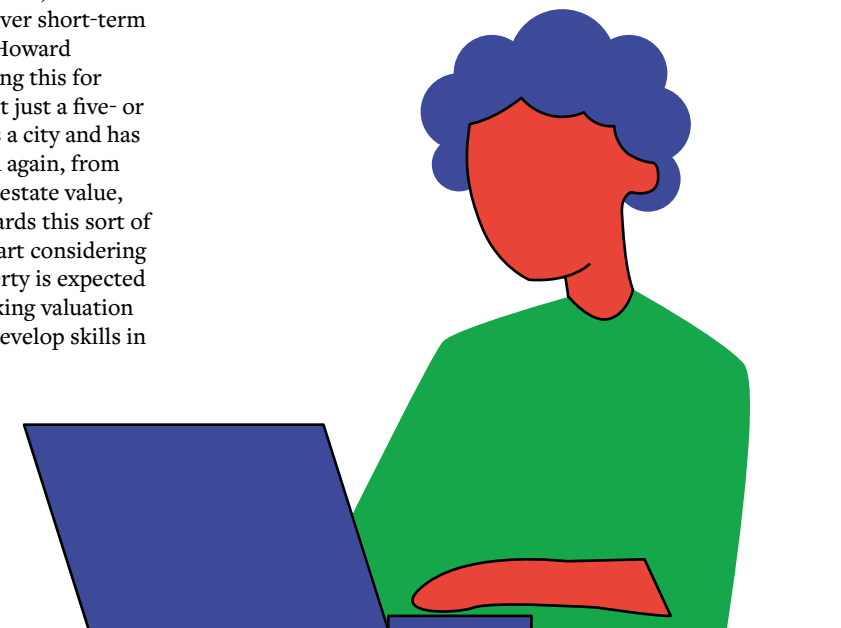
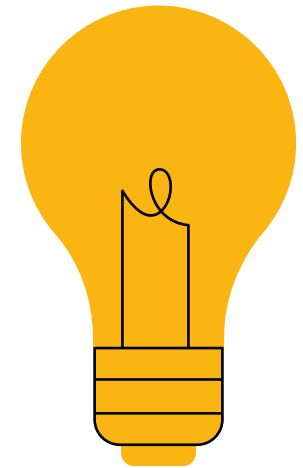
Canary Wharf Group is a good example of a landowner which had consistently re-developed, re-used, reinvented and re-purposed its estate to adapt to changing stakeholder needs and market conditions. Developers like Native Land at Bankside Yards create ultra-flexible buildings capable of what it calls 'hypermixity' and an active management approach. The focus here is not 'build it and b\*gg\*r off' but to create truly sustainable, robust and growing income streams. Investors are now prioritising sustainable practices, tenant satisfaction and long-term asset performance over short-term gains. London's Great Estates like Grosvenor, Howard de Walden and the Crown Estate have been doing this for centuries, investing in places for perpetuity, not just a five- or 10-year return. This is important for London as a city and has provided places that people return to again and again, from across the world. This is the real source of real estate value, and London deserves a massive skills shift towards this sort of profession. At the very least, valuers need to start considering management impact on the net income a property is expected to generate, while providing more forward-looking valuation methods. Such a shift requires valuers to also develop skills in complex, forward-looking systems analysis, financial modelling, data analysis and understanding of market dynamics.

Such a transition may push many professionals out of their comfort zones. However, AI and machine learning can serve as valuable tools in this evolution. These technologies can analyse vast datasets to model complex systems and relationships between markets, stakeholders, investors and

macroeconomic factors. By leveraging AI, professionals can gain insights that were previously unattainable, enhancing decision-making and strategic planning.

In conclusion, the future of London's built environment doesn't lie in the continuous construction of new properties to 'build, use and throw away'. Instead, it hinges on developing skills that foster the creation of business models and conditions where buildings can be reused, refurbished, repurposed and retrofitted. Such an approach not only enhances and extends the income-producing capabilities of properties but also aligns with sustainable development goals.

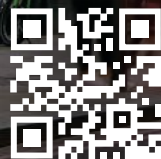
Embracing this paradigm shift requires a concerted effort to reskill the workforce, integrate advanced technologies and cultivate a forward-thinking mindset. By doing so, London can ensure its built environment remains resilient, sustainable and responsive to the evolving needs of its inhabitants. ●





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OPINION

## HOW CAN WE SOLVE THE HOUSING CRISIS?

Fabrix director of regeneration and impact *Debbie Whitfield* argues that the answer isn't just building more, but building better



Few in the industry would challenge the need for the government's 1.5 million new homes, even if there are questions about its deliverability. But put simply, the focus needs to be on much more than a number. What we deliver matters, and if we try to build our way out of trouble with ex-urban, car-dependent, semi-detached houses, we'll replace a housing crisis with an environmental and social catastrophe.

The question of viability also can't be ignored. Mass housebuilders and small-to-medium-sized developers alike are facing an unprecedented challenge as the wider market—especially the cost of construction—continues to affect the sector. Affordable housing is often one of the first things to go, which is not something we can countenance if we want to deliver the homes that are really needed.

So, the business-as-usual approach is out of the window. How can we deliver not only the volume of homes, but also the right mix, in the right places, all supported by the right types of economic, community and transport infrastructure?

There is no catch-all solution, but part of the fix, we believe, is the creative and efficient delivery of alternative homes alongside meaningful community uses. That means the right mix of housing types and tenures, built for the genuine variety of people and families across the UK.

Take, for instance, 182–202 Walworth Road, a prime example of the type of creative development solutions which can have significant positive impact.

In 2022, Fabrix acquired this stalled 0.34ha site in Elephant and Castle with an unviable consent for total demolition. We re-examined the existing building to identify ways to optimise its potential and invested time in building local relationships so we understood what the community needed and could deliver uses which integrated with the neighbourhood.

The result is a new 283-bed student accommodation-led scheme which repurposes part of the existing building, alongside 23 new affordable homes for social rent—that's 35 per cent of the

units. This will all be delivered alongside a rich mix of uses centred on community, food and nature, developed in direct response to what we heard from local people. An existing service yard is being transformed into a new community courtyard garden for all, and an innovative new community kitchen will use the power of food to connect young and old and tackle social isolation.

### 'The business-as-usual approach is out of the window'

Southwark has a large student population which, given the stark shortfall in the capital's purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA), puts pressure on existing family homes. The London Plan estimates that every 2.5 PBSA rooms frees up a home elsewhere in the capital, so the 283 student beds will enable the release of around 113 family homes across the borough.

There is no one-size-fits-all solution to the housing crisis—but with the creativity and effort required to get under the skin of an area and deliver what is really needed, we can work towards a world where we can build less, build better and create places we'd like to call home. ●



Elephant and the rooms—Fabrix's Walworth Road student accommodation-led project in Elephant and Castle



# UNLOCKING CAMDEN'S INNOVATION

Leader of Camden Council *Richard Olszewski* describes how the authority is focused on building an inclusive innovation district



In these turbulent times, Camden is focused on creating spaces for frontier innovation that deliver both growth for London and the UK and prosperity for Camden's citizens

The London Growth Plan, jointly produced by London Councils and the Mayor of London, sets out the scale of the shifts and challenges in the city as well as the vital ambition to increase productivity and deliver benefits for Londoners that they feel in their pockets.

As the backdrop to this is international trade turmoil and uncertainty, long term low growth and tight public finances it is right for the government to prioritise growth as its number one mission, and for Camden to commit to delivering on this in our places too.

The growth plan lays out the huge opportunities from frontier innovation in driving growth and investment in London, particularly in AI, health and life sciences, and quantum technology, as well as the intersection of these industries.

Camden is one place where this growth will happen, and we continue to shape investment into our places. The Knowledge Quarter (the KQ) around Kings Cross, Euston and Bloomsbury, and which spans into London Borough of Islington, is already Europe's leading innovation district—it's home to more than 300 research organisations, including world-leading institutions like the Alan Turing Institute and the Wellcome Trust, and to private sector giants like GSK, AstraZeneca and MSD. This area generated more than £34 billion of GVA for the UK in 2021, and more than 2,300 high-growth companies have raised over £12 billion in the past few years. Anchored by the Crick and UCL, there is also a focused cluster in the KQ of world-leading life science research and commercialisation, increasingly using applied AI.

Building on the success of Kings Cross Central, the area continues to grow apace. Tribeca on Camley Street is London's largest purpose-built life science development, and with phase 1 complete the London BioScience Innovation Centre will open its new space, providing state-of-the-art lab and write-up space for grow-on companies. MSD's Discovery Centre and HQ on Euston Road is rising out of the ground, Mitsui Fudosan and the British Library have committed to the £1.1 billion investment in the extension of the library site, and British Land has just got planning approval for its £600 million Euston Tower scheme, to go alongside existing investments at

Regent's Place where it has partnered with the Crick. This is before we get to Euston and the potential opportunity there.

Camden itself is leading investment and development. At Camley Street we have partnered with Ballymore and Lateral for the delivery of a £500 million mixed-use scheme that will create 350 new homes (50 per cent affordable) and more than 200,000 square feet (c. 18,600 sqm) of research and office space, alongside new light industrial spaces.

This means that overall, more than four million square feet (c. 370,000 sqm) of research, commercialisation, grow-on and scale-up space is coming to the Knowledge Quarter over the coming years.

Growth and investment alone won't shift things for our residents—we need the KQ to be inclusive, so residents have access to the opportunities here, from working in cutting-edge industries or setting up a new company to accessing new public spaces.

Through deep collaboration with our local partners, we've already made great strides in delivering this. We start with our young people, and our STEAM programme means every child in Camden is presented with opportunities in innovation sectors, including through work experience (1,000 placements a year), and our London AI Campus in partnership with Google, to inspire and educate students and teachers in AI and digital skills. Our three-borough partnership LIFT helps residents to find work, training and enterprise opportunities in tech, creative industries and the life sciences sector (2,500 people supported to date). And through the planning system, alongside typical commitments to jobs and apprenticeships, we have ensured public access to new spaces inside developments such as the British Library, as well as commitments to public engagement and education.

Why is all this important? We know that cluster effects mean there are important positive spillovers between companies and institutions. The KQ is more than the sum of the individual academics or pharma companies based here—it's an ecosystem of shared services, skilled workers and knowledge exchange. Camden has a duty to support and grow this eco-system, for the benefit of everyone. This will produce jobs and GVA growth. Our economic impact assessment for the Euston development alone points to potential £41 billion GVA, and 34,000 new jobs. But this will mean little if people can't feel the benefit in their lives directly or access the places that are created. So, Camden's mission is to make sure we stimulate an inclusive innovation district that creates local opportunities, raises living standards and creates a place where people want to invest, work and live. ●



Going up—British Land's consented £600 million Euston Tower scheme viewed from Tottenham Court Road



# HEALTHY HERITAGE LIVING

Chetwoods Architects associate *Helena Thomas* says repurposing historic buildings, such as the Essex County Hospital, into residential demands both technical skill and reverence



The only way is Essex—Chetwoods’ plans to convert the Essex County Hospital into residential



Conversion of the grade II-listed Essex County Hospital into residential apartments presented a complex challenge—one that demanded a sensitive balance between preservation and modernisation. On a site with roots tracing back to Roman times, the hospital building, first constructed in 1819 and extended over the 19th and 20th centuries, has long been a significant local landmark and healthcare provider. The project was commissioned by Essex Housing, a new initiative within Essex County Council, established to work with public-sector partners in bringing forward surplus land and assets to help meet housing needs across the county.

Repurposing such a historic building requires more than technical skill—it demands reverence. Adaptive re-use allows structures nearing the end of their functional life to be revitalised, preserving architectural and cultural heritage while providing them with a relevant new role. This approach prevents demolition and ensures historical continuity in the urban fabric.

Navigating preservation regulations while incorporating contemporary amenities involved a series of careful decisions. Our approach was heritage-led but future-focused. While issues such as structural deterioration and brickwork restoration were central concerns, we recognised that the success of the project would ultimately be judged by the

impact on the streetscape and the building’s integration into the community.

A major strategy was to ensure that the renewed building did not stand as a relic but became a catalyst for wider regeneration. This meant embedding the project within a masterplan that not only respected the original campus character but also connected it to the broader Colchester Conservation Area. We drew upon historical documents that referenced a lawn setting in front of the building, reinstating it to provide an elegant transition between the old and new. This not only honoured the past but also created a more welcoming environment for future residents.



The project is on site and due to complete early next year

Preserving a historic building doesn’t mean freezing it in time. It means allowing it to evolve in a way that respects its past. We carefully integrated modern housing standards—ensuring comfort, safety, and functionality—while retaining the essence of the original structure. From roof finishes to internal layouts, every detail was scrutinised for how it would support both heritage value and contemporary living. We worked closely with Colchester County Council and Historic England to understand how to best adapt the building. This required a number of strategies, all working iteratively, to identify both the detail and the overarching themes of the existing building and site and to explore ways which not only preserve but also enhance the existing building fabric.

Historic buildings offer far more than aesthetic appeal—they are cultural anchors, rich with memory and meaning. They contribute to local identity, stimulate economic activity and can spark revitalisation in surrounding areas. However, to remain relevant, they must be adaptable. That requires a planning approach that supports flexibility, and governance that sees heritage as an asset rather than a constraint.

Our experience at Essex County Hospital reaffirms the idea that successful regeneration is not about preservation versus progress—it’s about synergy. Old buildings, especially those with listed status, can be important catalysts for regeneration. With thoughtful design and strategic planning, they can continue to serve communities in meaningful ways for generations to come. ●



# UNLOCKING CAPITAL FOR THE CAPITAL

Opportunity London CEO *Jace Tyrrell* explains why global investors should bet on London now



Turmoil on a macro scale is sending ripples of uncertainty across the capital markets. The start of 2025 has already tested investor resilience, with persistent geopolitical tensions, trade shocks and inflationary pressures shaping sentiment across the globe.

And yet, in times of volatility, capital seeks certainty and that's where London comes in.

Despite global instability, London remains one of the safest and most transparent markets in the world. It offers long-term stability, currency advantages and a proven track record of reinvention and resilience. According to JLL's February 2025 investor survey, 79 per cent of respondents rated London as more attractive than other major global cities, with 30 per cent considering it very attractive, outperforming Paris, Berlin, Tokyo and New York.

At MIPIM this year, global investors reaffirmed London's status among the world's top-tier destinations for capital. Conversations around place-based investment and sustainable development underscored the city's enduring appeal, along

with strong appetite for our £10 billion in transport hub regeneration schemes.

After two decades of attending the conference, this year was certainly different. The energy on the ground and in conversations I had with investors was one of confidence, ambition and renewed alignment across the public and private sectors. The inaugural attendance from Mayor of London Sadiq Khan sent a clear message to the international community: global capital has a choice, and London is open for business.

## Where capital is coming from and where it's going

Over the past six months, we've seen renewed momentum from US private equity, Middle Eastern sovereign wealth funds and European institutions. While high-net-worth individuals and family offices remain highly active, institutional capital is firmly back in play. JLL's latest data shows private equity is expected to be the most active buyer in 2025, followed closely by private investors and institutional funds.

This capital isn't just moving—it's being targeted. Logistics and single-family housing continue to top the list of resilient sectors, while London offices are showing signs of resurgence. Meanwhile, demand is picking up in high-growth areas like data centres, energy and infrastructure, and urban retail—sectors that reflect long-term confidence in London's evolution.

These priorities align closely with the Opportunity London portfolio. Regeneration areas in Newham, Southwark and Croydon are attracting serious interest from global investors, especially where housing delivery, infrastructure upgrades and net zero ambitions converge. These are the projects that promise both scale and impact and where capital can go further.

## London is still drawing capital

Despite headlines suggesting capital flight and an exodus of the wealthy, the evidence



'The message is loud and clear: London is open for investment' — Mayor Sadiq Khan at MIPIM



A strong London delegation in attendance at MIPIM, including the Mayor of London Sadiq Khan for the first time

tells a different story. London continues to attract a steady stream of international investment, with the US, Europe and the Middle East expected to provide the most capital this year.

You only need to look at recent activity to see this in motion. From major investments at Heathrow Airport and St Katharine Docks, to forward-looking projects in the Knowledge Quarter at King's Cross and the New Bond Street estate, global capital is backing London's future. Growth-led schemes like Brent Cross Town, and sustainability-focused investment from British Land and London Legacy Development Corporation, show London's appeal to investors who value both resilience and reinvention.

## 'Demand is picking up in high-growth areas like data centres, energy and infrastructure, and urban retail'

With over £20 billion of live investable opportunities across the capital, there's a real chance to shape the city's next development cycle. ESG is now central to this. According to JLL, 76 per cent of investors say sustainability has influenced their

investment decisions, with EPC ratings, net zero alignment and retrofit potential among the biggest factors. That doesn't signal a retreat, rather a shift toward future-proofed value.

Housing delivery remains a challenge. Even with greater political stability and pro-housing policies, viability is still a barrier to unlocking supply at scale. But the appetite is there, and solutions are emerging.

Investor sentiment is increasingly optimistic, but long-standing blockers remain. The Planning and Infrastructure Bill is a welcome step, but reforms need to be implemented with urgency and purpose. We need to accelerate grid connections, modernise planning processes, reduce gateway friction and address rising construction costs.

Other global cities are not standing still. New York and Melbourne are offering tax incentives to attract capital into green and inclusive growth. London should consider similar interventions if we want to remain competitive.

## London is open, now let's deliver

Last year, a snap election was called in the middle of UKREiF. This year, we return to Leeds with more stability, clearer ambition and a full pipeline of marketing opportunities. Capital is ready, the question is—can we unlock it at scale?

At Opportunity London, our mission is clear: unlock capital for the capital. As the first true global partnership for a global city, we are committed to attracting investment into London's low-carbon real estate, energy and infrastructure. The opportunity is here, and we're just getting started. ●





Setting the pace—converting foot power into energy

# A REAL STEP CHANGE

*Raluca Racasan* looks at how one company is unlocking the power of the human footstep to generate clean energy and bring communities together for good

When it comes to climate change, we are racing against the clock, and the built environment as a collective of businesses and institutions is taking targeted action and responsibility for what it's putting into, and taking out of, the environment. Enter Laurence Kemball-Cook, an industrial design engineer, who believes in the power of smart cities that can do better. It all started with an innovative approach to sustainable energy generation, hundreds of failed experiments, a bit of luck, and a lot of ambition. The result is an ingenious kinetic floor tile technology that, when stepped upon, generated clean, off-grid electricity, all from the power of one simple step. The vision? Imagine what hundreds, thousands, or even millions of steps could achieve!

'I've always been fascinated with cities and how people behave in urban environments. And I wanted to create a way that we can improve the cities we live in and make them more sustainable,' says Kemball-Cook, CEO of Pavegen, the company that produces and installs these ingenious floor

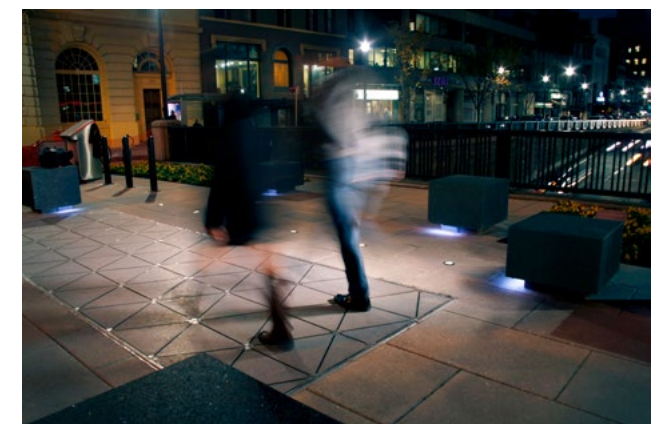
tiles all around the world. 'I thought, why don't we create something that seamlessly integrates within our urban infrastructure? I experimented, and I failed, and failed, and failed, and failed. The first product was made in eight hours, in the workshop, and when you stood on it, it went crunch. It wasn't very efficient. But it showed that you could generate power. Then the next version I made was more durable, and I replaced duct tape and wood with beautifully machined stainless steel. If you fast forward, we've done hundreds and hundreds of different versions. And that became a Pavegen floor, which is a floor you can walk on, and it will generate power,' he explains. The first prototype was received with excitement. 'We ended up taking it to my old school and we covered the corridor in it. I didn't know what to expect, but the kids loved it! Every day they were jumping on it, running up and down. All the teachers used to shout at them for running, but now they encouraged them because they generated more power. We made energy fun!' he adds.

Today, Pavegen is unlocking the value of the human footstep, making every step count, all around the world. In the UK, the technology used the footsteps of thousands of travellers at Heathrow airport to turn a dull corridor into an off-grid, energy-generating walkway and interactive experience, while at Leighton Buzzard train station two clean-electricity-generating walkways help to power a data screen, display monitor and two USB charging benches for commuters by the station entrance. The tile has found many uses elsewhere too. 'We built a running track in Hong Kong on the fourth storey of the JP Morgan WeWork building. And as people run on this running track, their steps are converted into power for the building. We also have a digital currency where we reward people for running on the track,' Kemball-Cook tells me, highlighting what he calls the 'gamification of energy.'

The research and development process doesn't end, and Pavegen has been finding ways to constantly improve and adapt. The tile is durable, waterproof and heat resistant. 'It's really easy to install and anyone in the world can do that. We realised in COVID when we couldn't send teams out to site that we've got to make it a kit. So now anyone can just put the Pavegen together.' Another ingenious response to external factors is the Solar+ tile, which uses both kinetic and solar energy capture technology to generate power. 'We realised that in the Middle East, in summer in the middle of the day no one goes outside because of the heat, so we thought what if we could find a way to use energy from the sun and from people. We could get an amazing amount of power from the five hours during the hottest part of the day and then again at nighttime. You've got 24/7 power because there are people walking at nighttime in Riyadh, and the tile will produce 30 times the amount of energy,' he explains. Even in London weather, the Solar+ tile will still generate up to six times more energy than from walking alone.

A lot of large-scale projects seem to be unfolding in the Middle East for Pavegen, and there is a reason why. 'I think innovation always requires a big step. You need bold individuals to come up with new ideas to make changes happen and I think that the appetite for innovation in Southeast Asia and the Middle East is a lot higher than in the UK, which has a very conservative view to development. But the Olympics was a testament that we can do it if we really do pull out all the stops,' Kemball-Cook adds. The Pavegen installation at West Ham subway station feeding the Olympic Park harvested the energy from over 1 million footsteps to power 12 LED floodlights at the station over the course of the Olympic and Paralympics Games.

But, as important as that is, it's not just about generating energy. It's also about engaging communities, bringing people together to contribute to something positive, and as a result getting them to love their cities even more. 'Happiness in a city is about connecting with people. We saw how many people left London during the pandemic, because social interaction is such a big reason why we like our cities. Pavegen brings people together through the shared value of energy and sustainability, and this is incredibly important to us,' he adds. 'People really want to feel like they're part of something. And that's exactly what we do at Pavegen—make the world a better place through something as simple as walking. That's amazing,' he says. We couldn't agree more. ●



Paving the way—the technology has a wide range of applications



# SHUTTER SPEED

We take a look at MacFarlane Place, the Maccreanor Lavington-designed affordable homes in White City

Developer: **Mitsui Fudosan UK**  
Housing association: **Peabody**  
Architect: **Maccreanor Lavington**  
Engineer: **Arup**







MacFarlane Place — the scheme comprises 143 affordable-tenure homes



#### THE DEVELOPER'S ACCOUNT

**Gareth Healy**

Senior development director, Stanhope

Completing the MacFarlane Place project is an important moment in the continuous regeneration of White City. Stanhope has been proudly working on the redevelopment of Television Centre in White City for over a decade, helping the area evolve from a mainly commercial and institutional district into a modern and vibrant mixed-use neighbourhood. MacFarlane Place is the latest project to reach completion in this ongoing work, signifying the launch of phase 2 of the masterplan for developer Mitsui Fudosan UK.

This project, delivered with exemplary partners Peabody, Kier and Maccleanor Lavington, plays a key role in providing high-quality affordable homes in the London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham.

The development comprises 142 affordable-tenure homes, including homes for London affordable rent, shared ownership and, for the first time in this location, London living rent. The scheme has been shaped to support a broad cross-section of residents—from key workers and young professionals to carers and families—providing much-needed homes in an area undergoing rapid regeneration.

This project reflects our long-term commitment to creating places. With a focus on building communities, the development sits between highly accessible transport links, world-class restaurants and retail options and a local culture rich with arts and creativity.

All aspects of MacFarlane Place have been created through close collaboration between design, delivery and client teams, resulting in a scheme that is architecturally robust, socially meaningful and environmentally responsible.

The architecture, delivered by Maccleanor Lavington, responds seamlessly to the local heritage and contemporary community. Integrated between Victorian railway structures and modern commercial developments, the red-brick buildings combine durable materials with precast detailing referencing the nearby grade II-listed Dimco buildings, rooting the scheme in its historic context. At street level, carefully crafted public spaces with active frontages create a welcoming realm. The site acts

as a natural gateway to the next phase of the Television Centre masterplan.

The project features shared outdoor spaces including a podium garden and rooftop terrace, offering easy access to nature and social interaction. Combined with 860 square metres of flexible commercial space on the ground floor, the scheme embodies a people-first approach, balancing convenience, community and high-quality design.

Stanhope is a certified B Corp, maintaining high standards of social and environmental performance, transparency and accountability. This project was no exception. The buildings are all-electric, with air-source heat pumps at roof level providing heating and hot water. We reduced embodied carbon through the use of GGBS in the concrete frame and by avoiding transfer structures where possible. The development achieves a whole-life carbon figure of 799 kgCO<sub>2</sub>e/sqm, in line with RIBA 2025 targets.

More than 500 external solar-control shutters—the largest residential installation of this kind in the UK—offer passive, low-energy protection from overheating, improving comfort and reducing costs for residents.

Generating social value, the project upskilled 60 individuals, created 30 new jobs and awarded £29.5 million of work to local SMEs. Through engagement with schools and targeted investment, the benefits have been felt far beyond the site.

We are proud to work with Mitsui Fudosan UK in delivering much-needed affordable homes to White City and forming an urban corridor to the next phase of our wider plans at Television Centre.



Shading it—a distinctive feature of the scheme is the 500 external solar-control shutters





The homes represent a meaningful contribution to Peabody's mission—providing high quality affordable homes for Londoners



### THE HOUSING ASSOCIATION'S ACCOUNT

**Ed Major**

Senior development manager, Peabody

Temporary accommodation costs councils an estimated £90 million each month across London, putting our city at the forefront of the UK's housing crisis. Our founder, George Peabody, established the Peabody Trust more than 160 years ago with the goal of providing high-quality affordable homes for Londoners who needed them the most. While times and context have changed, our charitable purpose has not.

That's why we're proud to have joined forces with Stanhope and Mitsui Fudosan UK to deliver 142 new homes at MacFarlane Place in White City, a development that forms part of the wider regeneration of the iconic former BBC Television Centre. These homes represent a meaningful contribution to our mission—71 are for London affordable rent, 34 for London living rent, and 37 for shared ownership, offering a diverse mix of affordable housing for the local community. Working with Hammersmith and Fulham council, the London living rent homes have been allocated to keyworkers.

We are also thrilled to bring Peabody to the iconic Television Centre development and become part of the White City community. As a resident of the local area myself, this project holds particular personal significance. Working in close partnership with the teams at Stanhope and Mitsui Fudosan UK, it's great to see what has collectively been achieved for this project.

At every stage, we've remained focused on keeping the homes and living costs for residents affordable, without compromising on quality. That principle has guided the design and delivery of MacFarlane Place—and the design and construction teams have more than risen to the challenge.

The buildings neatly respond to a particularly constrained site nestled between the Hammersmith & City line and Wood Lane, providing challenges for acoustics and overheating.

Where some might have seen obstacles, we were fortunate to be working with a team who saw the opportunities created by the site context. Take overheating, for instance. Instead of relying on mechanical cooling

systems—which are costly and carbon-intensive—the design team came up with the solution of roller shutters. This simple yet effective solution keeps homes cool in summer, keeps bills low and adds character to the buildings.

Another example: instead of balconies adjacent to a busy road, in most homes the amenity space has been internalised, creating spacious and generous-feeling apartments. Meanwhile, shared outdoor areas foster social interaction and community cohesion.

Sustainability has also been a cornerstone of this project. Thanks to a fully electric energy strategy developed by Arup, residents will benefit from lower carbon footprints and greater energy efficiency.

The mid-rise brick buildings sit confidently within their surroundings, transforming what was once an unloved car park into a vibrant, welcoming place to live. The team at Kier have done an impressive job of delivering such a high-quality build against a particularly challenging economic backdrop.

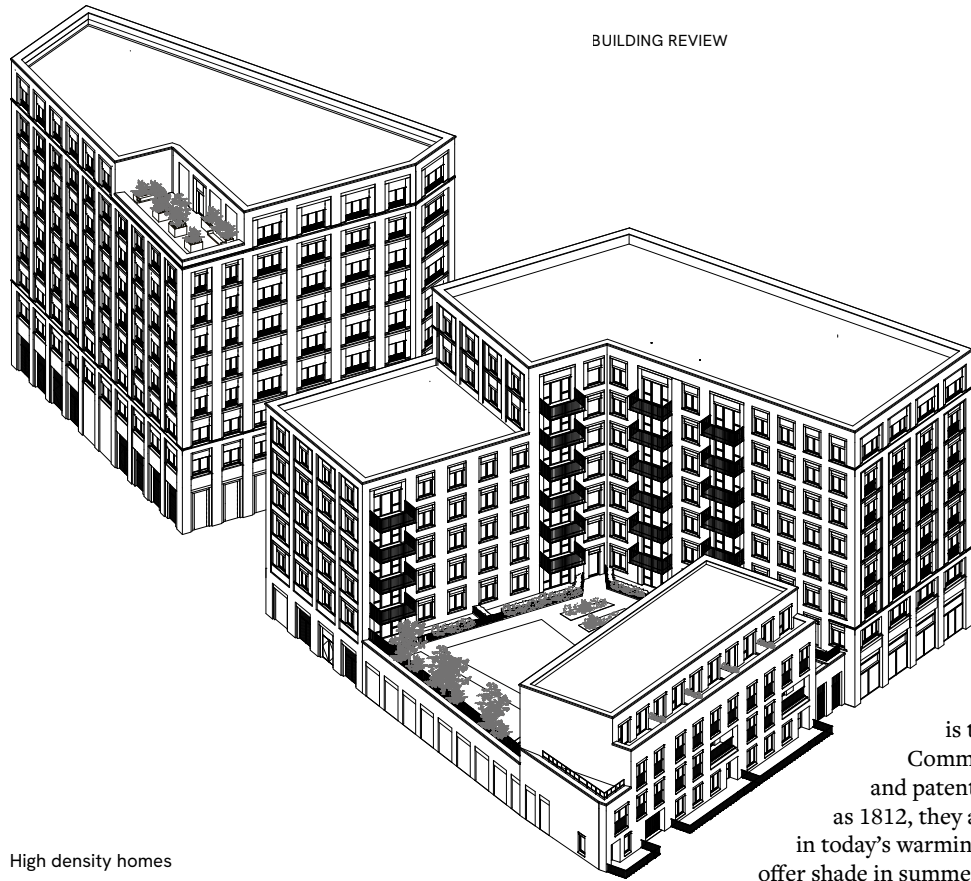
MacFarlane Place reflects what's possible when we collaborate with purpose. Together with our partners at Stanhope, Mitsui Fudosan UK and the talented teams involved in design and construction, we've created homes that are thoughtful, sustainable, and genuinely affordable.

This project is not just about new housing—it's about investing in communities, responding to London's housing crisis, and staying true to a legacy that began over a century and a half ago. At Peabody, we're proud to continue building that legacy today.



The mid-rise brick buildings sit on a former car park site





High density homes

**THE ARCHITECT'S ACCOUNT****Prisca Thielmann**

Director, Maccreanor Lavington

As part of Mitsui Fudosan UK's BBC Television Centre phase 2 redevelopment, and within AHMM's masterplan, MacFarlane Place has delivered 142 affordable homes for Peabody.

Designing homes at higher density in urban locations is central to our work at Maccreanor Lavington. It's a challenge we continually revisit, with the aim of creating places that feel genuinely homely—where residents feel a strong sense of belonging and pride. We recognise that, at the same time, buildings of this scale have a wider responsibility to their neighbourhood, contributing positively to the urban life around them.

While the site's wider context already had a remarkable commercial and cultural offering, it faced challenges in its immediate position, nestled between the noisy infrastructure of a railway viaduct and the heavily trafficked Wood Lane. Previously, the BBC had used the site as a back-of-house multi-storey car park, reinforcing a sense of disconnection between Shepherd's Bush and White City—two areas already divided by the elevated Hammersmith & City line.

To repair this urban gap, we introduced two defined volumes along Wood Lane. Their scale and materiality mediate between the red-brick Victorian architecture of Shepherd's Bush and the taller, newer buildings in White City. Set among mature London plane trees, the facades adopt a classical composition inspired by large Victorian mansion blocks. We were drawn to how that typology modulates large-scale

volumes—their horizontal order recognisable from afar, but rich with layered detail up close.

MacFarlane Place rises from a deeper plinth, accommodating commercial units into an articulated middle composed of piers and spandrels, concluding in an attic storey. Though clearly related, the two buildings are designed as siblings, not twins—creating visual coherence without uniform repetition. Special attention was given to the expression of windows, each framed with brick detailing to bring depth and rhythm to the facades.

A distinctive element is the use of external shutters.

Common in continental Europe and patented in France as early as 1812, they are increasingly relevant in today's warming climate. The shutters offer shade in summer as well as privacy and tranquillity at night, encouraging an intuitive, passive response to heat—much like seeking the shade of a tree—unlike mechanical systems that promote constant use. They also lend a visible, domestic rhythm to the facades, reflecting the daily life of residents.

Communal entrances have been positioned to face a new shared space between the two buildings. Set back from Wood Lane, this sheltered threshold creates a calm point of arrival, offering opportunities for informal encounters between neighbours. Longer term, there is potential to open a pedestrian route through the arches of the railway viaduct, providing a missing east/west route and direct access to Hammersmith Park and further integrating the development into the wider neighbourhood.

## 'The two buildings are designed as siblings, not twins'

To the south, the massing steps down to a lower maisonette block with individual front doors, in response to the Victorian terraces opposite. This transition allows sunlight into the shared courtyard garden and rooftop terrace—important communal spaces designed for relaxation, play, food-growing and fostering connection among residents. Slightly pared-back elevations with dark red projecting balconies joyfully frame this setting. We hope that residents will enjoy their calm and comfortable homes within this animated part of London.



Communal entrances are positioned to face a new shared space between the two buildings, set back from Wood Lane





Shutters allow residents to shut out all unwanted solar gain when they're out, allowing them to return to a cool, comfortable home



Energy modelling gave Peabody and Stanhope confidence that air conditioning was not needed



**THE ENGINEER'S ACCOUNT**

**Andrew Mackay**  
Associate Director, Arup

The heating and hot water at MacFarlane Place are generated by air-source heat pumps, partially powered and offset by rooftop photovoltaic (PV) panels. Building regulation guidance for these types of systems was updated in 2021, which allowed the project team to revise the design and develop an ultra-efficient ‘single stage’ heat pump design. This means that the water temperature of the heat network is matched to the capability of the air-source heat pumps, eliminating the need for top-up heat sources such as water-source heat pumps or electric boilers. This design approach likely saved significant upfront cost and embodied carbon, but crucially, it reduced operational energy, maintenance and depreciation costs ultimately for the benefit of residents. The related fixed charges to residents should now be lower throughout the life of the building. Macfarlane Place is understood to be the first major development delivered to this newer standard.

Peabody are focused on minimising costs to their residents through reducing operational energy consumption but also avoiding complicated systems that require regular maintenance or expensive replacement. The MacFarlane Place project team embraced this approach in their response to the challenge of overheating. Window sizes were optimised to their orientation—ensuring generous daylight but not allowing excessive solar gain—and the external shutters were introduced. These allowed residents to shut out all unwanted solar gain when they’re out, allowing them to return to a cool comfortable home.

During design development, the temperature of every home was assessed under a range of scenarios using energy modelling software, considering the external noise, different styles of occupation and different hours of window opening and shutter use. The energy modelling results gave Peabody and Stanhope confidence that the homes would be comfortable without air conditioning, saving both Peabody and the future residents significant energy and lifetime cost.

Driving lower embodied carbon in projects is a priority for Stanhope as well as Arup. The concrete frame in buildings often contains significant carbon, however at MacFarlane Place the design was optimised to minimise this impact, leading to the lowest structural embodied CO2 per square metre of any newbuild Stanhope project, calculated at 165 kgCO2e/sqm GIA for Plot H1 and 182 for Plot H2. To deliver this, sophisticated finite element analysis was needed from an early design stage. Blade columns ensured that deflection limits could be maintained with a super slim 225mm slab on an 8m grid. The reduction in superstructure concrete weight that this generated meant that the substructure could also be minimised.

Kier and Arup worked closely together on the concrete specification to ensure that cement mixes were low in carbon but also could be delivered on budget and on programme. High cement replacement content slows down concrete curing, particularly in cold weather which often makes it unpopular with contractors. At MacFarlane Place the percentage of cement replacement was optimised depending on the external temperature; this allowed the delivery of slabs at a consistent pace throughout the superstructure works, starting in Summer and ending in Spring the following year. ●

Tim Crocker, Fiona Smallshaw



# WATERSHED MOMENT

We take a look at British Land's new Dock Shed mixed-use development at Canada Water

Developer: **British Land**  
Architect: **Allies and Morrison**  
Interior Architect: **Conran and Partners**



## THE DEVELOPER'S ACCOUNT

**David Lockyer**

Head of development, British Land

Dock Shed is a 180,000 sq ft (c. 16,700 sqm)

highly sustainable mixed-use building at Canada Water designed by Allies and Morrison, with lobby interiors by Conran and Partners. It is the first commercial building to be delivered in the first phase of British Land and Australian Super's 53-acre (21ha) Canada Water masterplan.

Creating a new town centre for central London, Canada Water is a mixed-use scheme that will deliver around two million sq ft (c. 186,000 sqm) of workspace, one million sq ft (c. 93,000 sqm) of retail, leisure, entertainment, education and community space, and between 2,000 and 4,000 new homes.

With wellbeing embedded and buildings supporting low-carbon living, the project will also create 12 acres (4.8 hectares) of new open space, including a 3.5-acre (1.4ha) park, 16 new streets, a new town square and the first new high street in London for 100 years.

A 21st-century take on a classic docklands warehouse, Dock Shed is a BREEAM outstanding and NABERS 4.5\* workspace situated within the heart of Canada Water. It features extensive 2,000–5,000 sq ft (186–465 sqm) terraces overlooking waterside surroundings—including British architect Asif Khan's iconic red boardwalk, Rafter Walk—and views of the London skyline.

Dock Shed—brought to life through British Land's expertise in creating market-leading campus environments—offers a best-in-class combination of sustainability and modern amenities, with expansive, light-filled floorplates. Set within the growing cultural and leisure scene emerging across the wider masterplan, with a nature reserve on its doorstep, a state-of-the-art leisure centre beneath, and green spaces all around, Dock Shed presents a unique workspace proposition that supports both productivity and wellbeing.

Designed to meet the needs of headquarter occupiers, floor-to-ceiling

wraparound windows, up to four metres tall, flood the 40,000 sq ft (c. 3,700sqm) floors with natural light, while openable windows enhance fresh air circulation throughout. Outside, the terraces are designed to encourage outdoor meetings, or serve as informal breakout areas, relaxation zones or social spaces for events.

On the lower floors and basement of the building, British Land, Allies and Morrison and Roberts Limbrick have delivered a state-of-the-art leisure centre for Southwark Council. With a multi-station gym, eight-lane swimming pool, yoga studios and a sports hall, Canada Water Leisure Centre will offer access to world-class wellness facilities for people working at Dock Shed and is set to open this summer.

Occupiers will benefit from a range of retail and leisure amenities including the recently opened Corner Corner, a new cultural hub from Broadwick—the founder of Printworks, which has planning permission to return as a permanent cultural venue at Canada Water—featuring live music, exceptional food-and-beverage pop-ups and London's largest indoor commercial farm, as well as padel courts which opened this spring.

The area will be further enhanced later this year, with a growing selection of retail and dining options at Canada Water—Sushi Revolution and the Village Tree were recently announced as the first two occupiers of the newly built spaces.

Interestingly, at the intersection of both an Underground and Overground train line, more under-35s can reach Canada Water within 45 minutes than any other central London commercial hub (JLL research), highlighting its strength as an emerging office location.

We're really proud of the progress we have made at Canada Water so far and look forward to completing phase one later this year, which will see a further 120,000 sq ft (c. 11,000 sqm) of flexible workspace, 186 new homes and further public realm.





Dock Shed is imagined as a contemporary interpretation of Canada Water's historic dock-side sheds



#### THE ARCHITECT'S ACCOUNT

**Paul Eaton**

Partner, Allies and Morrison

The Canada Water masterplan transforms Rotherhithe's docklands into a thriving, nature-filled town centre. As well as leading the masterplan, Allies and Morrison has also designed its first-phase buildings—Dock Shed, The Founding and Three Deal Porters.

Imagined as a contemporary interpretation of Canada Water's historic dock-side sheds, Dock Shed's architecture responds to the site's rich working history. Integrating two very different functions—a new leisure centre for Southwark Council alongside flexible workspace—it frames the revitalised Canada Dock, forms a new connection to Lower Road and helps to shape a new community space, Dock Office Gardens.

Dock Shed's 60m-wide dock frontage is crowned by a bold sawtooth roof, its geometry optimised for roof-mounted PV and large northlights. Below, each office floor opens on to full-width terraces fronted with delicate bronze balusters, twisted to open the building to the dock and respond to the dock's reed-filled wetland.

The design of the rear-facing facades has been just as carefully considered and respond to their close proximity to existing neighbours. South-facing stepped terraces on the building's smaller block are finished in a pale, ridged-terracotta cladding, differentiating it from the larger block. Smaller integral planters are built into the west-facing

bronze-coloured metal facade, which, as the plants become established, will soften and green the facade, improve biodiversity and provide screening and privacy.

The office space is entered from Deal Porters Way via a double-height entrance hall. Here, the storey-height steel trusses that support the office floors over the clear span of the sports hall below produce a powerful and memorable first impression. This flexible, column-free lobby space has a café and is generous enough to use for events. Openable doors and extensive glazing form strong connections with the outdoors.

Office floor plates are designed for ease of subdivision, with circulation cores permitting up to five separate units per floor. Throughout the building, all-electric heating and cooling is linked to a displacement ventilation system.

In keeping with the idea that this building is a 21st century warehouse, interiors are simple and robust—timber and pre-cast concrete provide a backdrop to the substantial steel beams and exposed services. Under the northlights of its pitched roof, the uppermost office floor is flooded with light.

Allies and Morrison collaborated with Roberts Limbrick on the building's leisure centre. Occupying the two basement levels and half of the ground floor, the design carefully maximises daylight. The pool sits under the impressive heft of the building's black steel trusses, lit by clerestory windows, while the gym's full-height windows overlook the pool from ground floor level. Additional visual links are created through the large glazed screen that separates the sports hall from the stair enabling all the key functional areas to be viewed from the reception area.



Making a splash—Allies and Morrison collaborated with Roberts Limbrick on the building's leisure centre, including a pool



Canada Water sports—Dock Shed's sports hall on the basement level









### THE INTERIOR ARCHITECT'S ACCOUNT

**Simon Kincaid**

Principal and Partner, Conran and Partners

Our longstanding relationship with British Land and our history with Allies and Morrison—from our collaboration at South Place Hotel to the iconic German Gymnasium in King's Cross—made Dock Shed an exciting and natural process. We were engaged to help not only shape the functional narrative and aesthetic identity of the space but also to apply the energy and ambition of Canada Water's phase one, as the project followed our commission to design the 186 apartments and amenities at neighbouring residential plot, The Foundling.

What makes Dock Shed truly distinct is its hybrid nature: part lobby, part café, part social hub. The brief demanded a space that would adapt to the needs of multiple user types, from workspace occupiers and their guests to the local community. As a specialist in both hospitality and residential design, we focused on creating an experience that would feel intuitive, welcoming and refined, while seamlessly accommodating practical and operational demands.

We started our design process by taking cues from the building's architectural expression—its industrial trusses, gridded structure and dockside heritage—to establish a linear, zoned layout. Rather than imposing divisions, we introduced a variety of layered interventions: soft drapery to balance the space's generous volume and acoustics; sculptural seating arrangements to encourage different modes of working or resting; and curated zones that shift in mood from open and communal to intimate and focused. This spatial rhythm offers a sense of calm and clarity, where users can orient themselves, engage with the architecture, or simply recharge.

Materiality plays a key role in bridging the industrial and the personal. The palette is purposefully restrained and tactile, with concrete screed flooring, dark timber and deep bronze alluding to both the area's industrial past and its historical ties to the timber trade. These are offset by bold, expressive furniture pieces developed in collaboration with Dodds & Shute, which add colour, texture and personality. Lush planting and natural light further reinforce the connection to the nearby wetlands and boardwalk.

One standout feature is a series of rope installations that cascade from ceiling to floor, delicately partitioning the space. These are more than decorative gestures as they are rooted in the site's dockside history and the craftsmanship synonymous with working warehouses. Using sisal, leather, suede and timber, we developed a woven language that embraces imperfection and the beauty of raw materials. Their intentionally graphic presence introduces visual intrigue while honouring the handmade.

Ultimately, Dock Shed is a space designed for adaptability and longevity, where function is not hidden but integrated, and where the layered aesthetic elevates everyday moments. Seeing how people move through and settle into the lobby space—whether for a quick coffee, an informal meeting or an afternoon of focused work—brings the vision to life in exactly the way we hoped. ●



Brendan Bell

'What makes Dock Shed truly distinct is its hybrid nature: part lobby, part café, part social hub'



# PLAY MAKER

Dinah Bornat, co-founder of ZCD Architects and author of *All to Play For*, answers NLQ's questions

## What is your proudest achievement and why?

I'll have to say writing my book. I've discovered that writing is a very singular experience, and not at all like designing a building. But I've just recently had the satisfaction of it becoming real, which has given it a life of its own now, including flying round the world. I'm hoping it can go on to change things.

## What would you have been if you hadn't chosen the path you did?

Maybe something else within architecture. It offers so many different ways of working, exploring ideas and taking new paths. In my career I have taught, designed, written policy and advised. It's quite broad. But if not architecture, I would like to make things or paint, I'm just not sure I could make any money doing either.

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

I landed a job as an 'office junior' before university at Edward Cullinan Architects, and worked there, in between studying and a couple of other jobs, for 16 years. To start with, I learned how an office works, and what architects do, and they all became my friends for life. Going straight from school into a place which just oozed passion and belief in architecture, environmental sustainability, building and social good was a stroke of luck. Ted of course was amazing to learn from, but it was a collective –everyone in the practice

taught me about how to 'do' architecture in an incredibly considered way.

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

If you're interested in architecture, it offers a lifetime of thinking and exploring. Things are changing fast, so learn as much as you can, keep your mind open and who knows where it will take you. Friends you make at university will be friends and colleagues for life.



Bornat—'intergenerational panels are the way forward'

## You are the leader of the public realm inclusivity panel at Earls Court. How has this process been as an experience?

It's been an amazing experience. We've been working with Earls Court for more than three years, leading the PRIP, a group of 15 local people with a range of needs who we meet once a month, reviewing as much of the developing masterplan together as possible.

Together, we've had the space and time to experiment, develop, learn and test ideas and really stretch what co-design and community engagement can look like at scale. The sessions are creative, with a spirit of working together. We have also collaborated with another

client of ours, the Van Leer Foundation, which has enabled us to dig deeper with our community engagement, involving parents of very young children. What we are doing at Earls Court is more than the sum of its parts. Intergenerational panels are the way forward in our work now. →



Pointing the way forward—co-design in action



Court in time—the vision for Earls Court





Hands-on with the community — ‘Seeing a place through the eyes of the people that liver there’



High visibility — diversity and inclusion in action

**How would you describe the design code that has emerged?**

It’s epic! We tackled it with the PRIP over two sessions, choosing the parts that were particularly focused on the public realm. By this point the panellists were well versed on the jargon around planning documents, and we were able to approach it in quite a structured way. We were very pleased that ECDC and the Hawkins Brown/Studio Egret West team were able to incorporate all their comments and suggestions.

**How would you say consultation is performed generally in London and beyond?**

It’s mixed, although I’d be positive about London and the UK in general. I have spent some time abroad as part of my research for the book. For better or worse, the planning system in the UK has resulted in quite sophisticated and extensive community consultation compared to many other parts of Europe and the US.

**How could it be improved?**

We need to move on from the idea that engagement is about ‘de-risking’ planning. It should be about long-term thinking, investment linked to social value, listening to less well-heard voices, and seeing a place through the eyes of the people that live there. Earls Court and other projects have taught us we need to stay involved, through construction, to build and maintain trust so we can manage all the issues that arise.

**How would you describe the built environment professions in terms of diversity and inclusion?**

The built environment professions maintain a poor level of diversity and inclusion, which stifles innovation and change. Small and diverse practices like ours are light on our feet—we can do things that the bigger practices can’t and stay ahead of the curve.

**How is the sector performing on this, relative to others?**

Badly! My daughter has just qualified as a doctor, a profession where women are now in the majority. The change has happened in her lifetime. It’s embarrassing that we aren’t moving at the same pace.

**You are also the author of a new book — *All to Play For: How to design child-friendly housing*. Do you believe that designing housing for children necessarily means good housing for all?**

No single group in society has the monopoly on design solutions, but I do think child-friendly housing is better housing. There are plenty of architects who want to design child-friendly housing, and I’m enjoying working with many of them. Between us we’d all like to be doing more!

**What are the main problems raised by largely ignoring this demographic?**

You miss meeting the needs of a significant percentage of the population—their everyday needs, their health and well-being (which has immediate and long-term implications). Thirty five per cent of the population are children along with one primary carer, who spend up to 85 per cent of their time close to home. Local neighbourhoods have a duty to support all of us throughout our lives, and neighbourhoods that are child friendly can help tackle issues of health and loneliness, among many others, that we all face.

**What practical suggestions have resulted from consultation with young people, in your experience?**

Young people are very sensitive and very empathetic. They also know a lot about their local area—where it is good to hang out, where they feel unsafe. They can give you specific ideas—like putting bike racks near benches, so they can lock their bike up when hanging out with friends, or making sure pavements are wide enough, which helps them feel safe. You’ll also hear how young people want to be part of the community, be seen and be welcomed.

**How can we better reach them?**

They are easy to find as they are in schools and youth clubs. We use our youth engagement toolkit—called voice opportunity power—which gives schools the confidence that we are carrying out quality engagement. But increasingly we include young people in intergenerational community consultation groups so that other residents can hear directly from them.

**Which areas of the country, or indeed which nations, are better performers in this area?**

London is looked to as being a good example, particularly around child-friendly policies. The London Plan has helped keep children on the agenda as it has a specific area of policy and an SPG. But other cities like Cardiff and Leeds have child-friendly policies and are worth watching.

**What single measure would improve this scenario?**

The key is to think about children and play strategically, right from the outset. That is what my book is about. It shows how to do it, how we can build housing more efficiently, and how we can involve children and young people in the conversation.

**Are you optimistic about development generally under the new government?**

I am an optimist, but I’ve never felt more challenged in my thinking by global events. In terms of development, I’m worried there is a lack of evidence and experience and a lot of powerful lobbying by the volume housebuilders, who are a major part of the problem. I would love to see a vision—I think child-friendly housing could be that vision. ●



By the book — ‘Child friendly housing is better housing’



# MAKING CONNECTIONS

Christy Vanek, director of global disability inclusion and accessibility at Otis Worldwide Corporation, describes the efforts London has made to improve journeys for those—like her—with access needs



Let me take your arm so we can take a stroll through London together. You will be my guide, because I am partially blind. And I will be your guide, drawing our attention to public transportation accessibility and inclusivity in the city.

I am an American woman living in Chicago, and a frequent business traveller in my role leading global disability inclusion and accessibility at Otis. I have night blindness, a shrinking visual field, a lack of distance vision uncorrectable with lenses and limited depth perception.

During my visit to London, I notice and appreciate the efforts made by the city to improve transport accessibility. My cane finds bumps at the entry to pedestrian crossings. The placement of pedestrian boxes to call for a walk signal are consistent around the city, and 'wait' signs are large and in high contrast (but lack any audio cue or pre-illumination at night, making it difficult for me to locate and activate them). The branding of the Underground stations is consistent throughout, helping me find entrances independently. The Tube stairs have edges with good colour contrast and

tactile markings and some escalators have helpful lighted direction-of-travel indicators. During my rides, Tube station announcements are spoken clearly, at adequate speed and volume, including information on whether the upcoming station has a step-free route (some older historical stations do not), and carriages had digital boards showing the next stop, which is helpful for deaf and hard of hearing riders—though not low-vision-friendly enough for my own use.

But it is really the people who distinguish London from other places I've visited and from home. When I ask a hotel staff member the way to the nearest Tube station (Old Street), he offers me his arm. He doesn't just walk me out the door and point vaguely down the street; he walks me to the station entrance, down the stairs and helps me find an Underground staff member who can assist me further, before bidding me farewell.

A friend, a Londoner who happens to be blind, told me Tube passengers with disabilities can request assistance from staff members. Upon my asking for help, the staff member radios ahead to my transfer and destination stations and links arms with me to guide me to the platform. He confirms whether I am okay with stairs when approaching stairs or escalators. As the train approaches, he explains to me that he will make sure the driver sees me boarding. Stepping off at King's Cross station, another staff member greets me, offering her arm to help me transfer to the Piccadilly line, as the visual signage for wayfinding is not accessible to me. At Green Park, we take a lift which has tactile flooring at the lift doors and extra-large buttons and numbering inside the cabin.

As we walk, I ponder the difference between 'accessibility' and 'inclusion'. 'Accessibility' means something is technically usable for a person with a disability. Although it may be inefficient, the compliance box has been ticked. 'Inclusion' is about how the experience feels. While this method of traveling through London takes more time than if there were such a level of accessibility that I could navigate the Tube alone, it is more efficient than walking and less costly than cabs. What I lose in time is made up for in feelings of connectedness to the city, awe at the engineering marvel of this vast transport system and gratitude for the people who guide me. I feel consistently welcomed and supported.

London public transport is not yet independently accessible for me, but in My London it is inclusive. ●

For information about transport accessibility and travel tools, including the travel mentoring service which supports people using public transport in and around London to become more confident and independent travellers, visit [tfl.gov.uk/transport-accessibility](https://tfl.gov.uk/transport-accessibility)

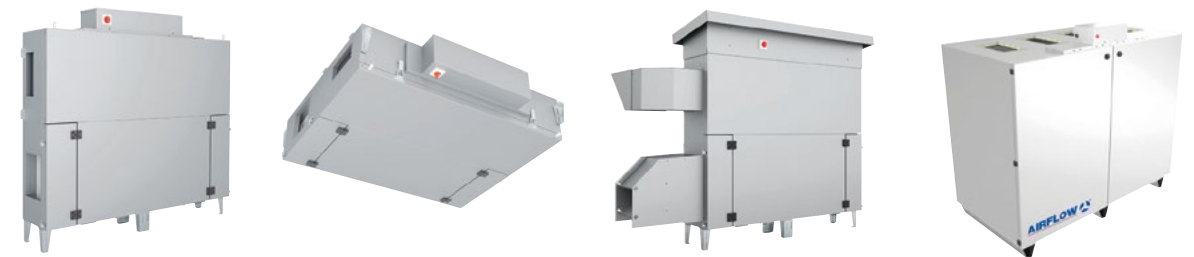


London scores on its accessibility facilities—but also people, and 'inclusion'

## MVHR with cooling



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# Q1 2025: REASONS TO BE CHEERFUL — BUT WHAT ABOUT LONDON?

By Mark Byles, regeneration director, Newsteer



With March's spring statement came a powerful sense that the real estate and development landscape is undergoing a fundamental shift. Labour's rallying cry of 'build, baby, build' isn't just political posturing—it's now a fiscal strategy.

At the heart of this shift is Green Belt land release through planning reform. The Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) estimates that December's National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) changes could lead to 170,000 net-additional homes over the next five years at 'no fiscal cost'. In creating Grey Belt and anticipating greater land release through more strenuous housing targets, the market will deliver these homes instead of the state. The OBR is clear: planning reform has 'no associated direct fiscal implications', yet could reduce government borrowing through increased housing delivery.

The numbers may sound ambitious, but the timeline is plausible. Most of the fiscal impact is forecast from 2027 to 2028, recognising the natural lag in site identification, plan-making, site promotion and delivery. Much of the additional development is expected to occur on Green Belt land, rather than brownfield sites—an underplayed yet seismic policy shift, with major implications for our town centres and particularly cities like London.

The government has set a revised housing target of 1.3 million homes UK-wide by 2030, with England accounting for roughly 1.1 million. This could unlock significant residential investment, reversing negative investment trends by 2027 and supporting stronger GDP growth through agglomeration benefits in productive city regions.

However, the data underpinning this optimism has flaws. Many key assumptions around land values and viability are based on historic 2018–19 figures. Since then, we've faced Brexit, COVID, the Ukraine war, inflation and cost pressures, all of which have deeply affected land values and development viability, particularly in London. The capital is notably absent from both the spring statement and the OBR's modelling, a worrying signal for the UK's most globally connected and economically significant city.

While Labour's pro-development stance is welcome, London appears to be a blind spot. London, which has the

greatest potential for economic agglomeration benefits through enabling development needs tall buildings. Many of its buildings are already tall. Yet the Building Safety Regulator is causing unsustainable delays, with 90 major schemes currently stuck at gateway two, and the Building Safety Levy, although delayed, confirmed to punish new development in tall buildings for the sins of the past. Despite London's acute housing need—with one child in every classroom living in temporary accommodation—the capital's only mention was the expansion of Heathrow.

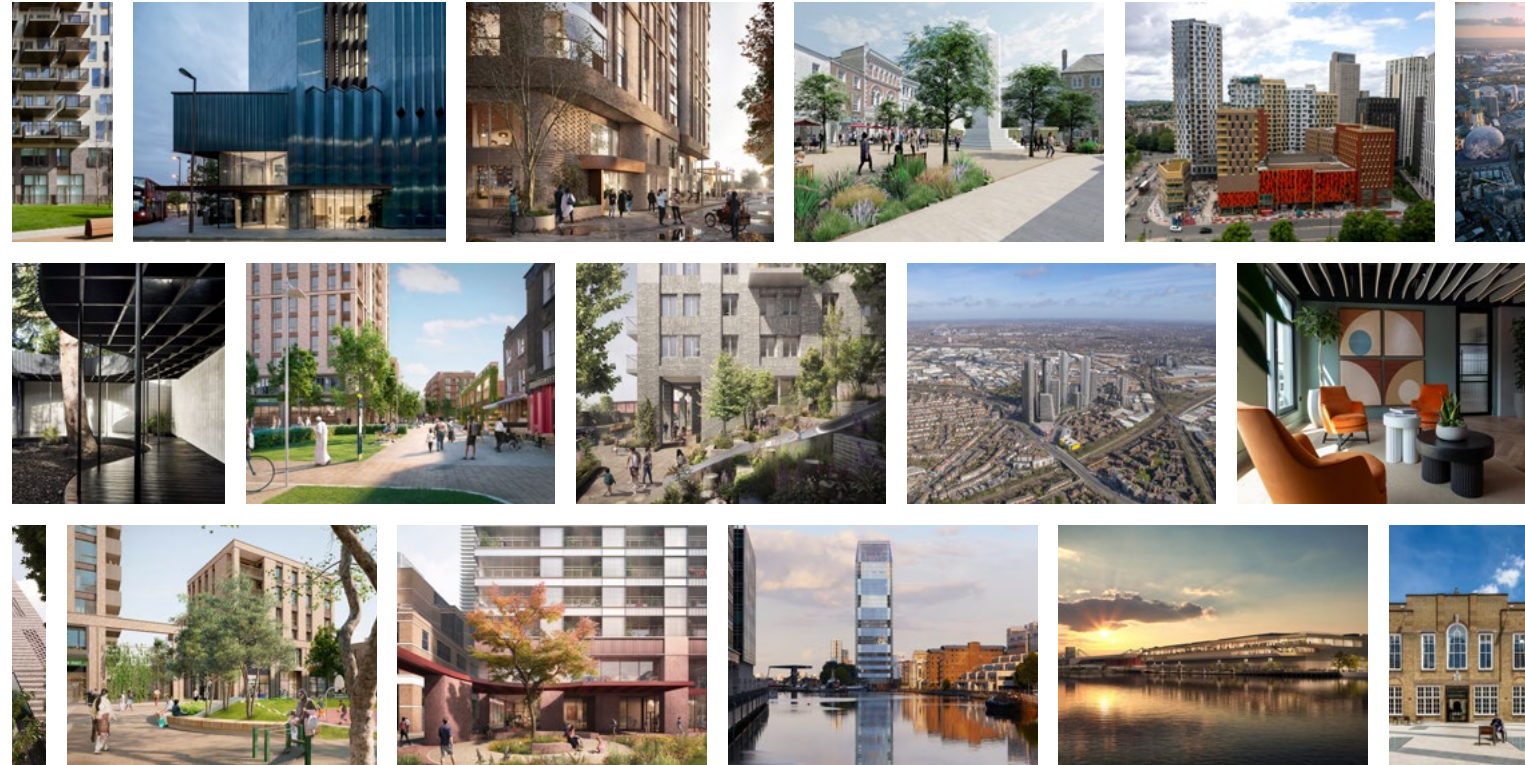
There are bright spots. Funding for defence estate upgrades and innovation infrastructure could unlock opportunities in industrial and logistics sectors, particularly around military hubs. The Affordable Homes Programme (AHP) received a £2 billion top-up and an extension, alongside the £300 million previously announced in February. This hybrid model aims to deliver 18,000 additional homes at £128,00 per unit—a welcome boost outside of London but barely touching the sides of what is required to deliver an affordable home in London. There is no clarity on how much of this funding will be split between the GLA and Homes England, but given current performance, Homes England is expected to take the lion's share.

## 'The mayor must face up to London's complexity and intervene in the viability gap'

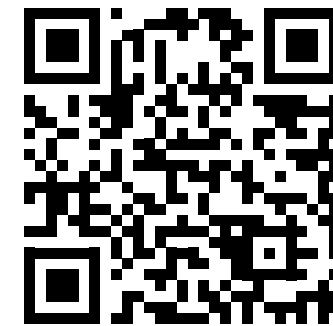
It feels like Q1 2025 marks the beginning of a new policy era. The spring statement was before the introduction of significant global tariffs being imposed by the president of the United States. With investment confidence in the US faltering, London shines brighter by comparison. Labour's current strategy may 'get Britain building'—outside the M25. But to truly 'get Britain growing' the government, and the mayor, must face up to London's complexity and intervene in the viability gap that continues to hinder progress in our capital. ●

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