

# WORKSHOP 2: HOUSING PROVISION AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> July 2009, 7<sup>th</sup> Floor, Westminster City Hall

Chairman: Councillor Phillipa Roe

Facilitator: Lisa O'Donnell

Officer Panel: Keith O'Malley, Fergus Coleman, Margaret Handovsky

## Efficient use of housing land

### ***1a) How can we optimise the number of new dwellings in residential sites without compromising design and amenity, and open space and other community needs?***

Comments from workshop attendees

The quality of social housing compared to private housing is poor. Cited a new social housing development – windows too narrow, room sizes too small. Social housing put at the back of developments.

There has been a disregard of standards of accommodation and facilities around developments. Noted Parker Morris standards used by the City Council in the past (for example at Churchill Gardens). Need to re-introduce standards appropriate to current demands.

Standards are welcomed, but need to consider their affordability.

Westminster has huge constraint on land. Need to consider how design can maximise use of that land. Recognise the attraction of standards; however, acceptable standards of living can be achieved in other ways than rigid standards. Also need to consider how the mixed use policy leads to the inefficient use of land, need to look at using more than one site to achieve good housing and good commercial development.

No attempt to meet housing need, the shortfall in housing provision is ever increasing.

A local resident stated there can be two problems with designing social housing:

- It is an example of social engineering
- It is still too expensive for poor residents

Permit densities appropriate to the concentration of immediate transport links and local amenities.

### ***1b) Should 850hr/ha remain the upper density limit in Westminster or could the upper limit of 1100 hr/ha in the London Plan be applied to the Paddington Opportunity Area.***

Comments from workshop attendees

There was support for density limit to remain.

There tends to be two standards in Westminster, one for social and the other for the private market.

	<p>Need to look at open space and supporting facilities, not just density.</p> <p>No in some locations higher density may be appropriate. At highest densities balconies and larger space standards may apply.</p> <p>Density should be in compliance with London Plan ranges.</p>
<p><b>1c) Given the market trend for very large homes with large room sizes and ancillary space, should we calculate density by using dwellings per hectare rather than habitable rooms?</b></p>	
Comments from workshop attendees	<p>Both options have some support.</p> <p>Density should be in compliance with London Plan ranges.</p>
<p><b>1d) The Core Strategy protects the number of residential units in schemes. Is it acceptable to lose one (or more) residential unit in case of a house de-conversion or redevelopment of sub-standard residential units?</b></p>	
Comments from workshop attendees	<p>De-conversion not supported because this would add to the shortage of housing.</p> <p>There is greater demand for smaller properties, given more people are living alone.</p> <p>Concerns were also raised over the amount of affordable housing that could be provided in any development. They were concerns over the number of payments in lieu of affordable housing.</p> <p>Some residents expressed concern over overcrowded accommodation in some areas of Westminster. In particular, Harrow Rd has experienced a number of conversions and many families are crammed in to properties which are unsuitable for their size.</p> <p>One point raised included the loss of land to developers and not enough provision of affordable housing with de-conversions.</p> <p>De-conversion can help growing families to stay in Westminster. Need to consider on a case by case basis.</p> <p>It should be acceptable to lose one or more residential units in de-conversion on redevelopment.</p>
<p><b>1e. Where a de-conversion is allowed in the market sector, should there be the possibility to request a payment to the Council's Affordable Housing Fund per each unit lost?</b></p>	
Comments from workshop attendees	<p>As stated earlier, one comment raised the issue over provision of money and how it is used.</p> <p>There are differences in the needs of the community. This was highlighted by the changing make up of households in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. A resident suggested that de-conversions push young families or single people out of the area.</p>

	<p>A policy should not necessarily be based on units but needs of people, so more decisions can be made on a case by case basis.</p> <p>No, query on the rationale for this.</p>
<b>Unit size mix</b>	
<b>2a. The SHMA will set out the dwelling sizes re. bedrooms and bed spaces required for market and affordable housing, which will then be translated into policy. Should we use a different dwelling size mix for affordable housing and market housing, or should the size mix be tenure neutral?</b>	
<p>Comments from workshop attendees</p>	<p>Need to offer variety of spaces for different groups. The recent Mayor's consultation on housing standards (the London Housing Design Guide 2009) allows for different standards for different housing types.</p> <p>Acknowledge the shortage of family sized units, but there is also demand for other groups, e.g. 60-65% growth of singles and couples.</p> <p>Lots of demand for smaller sized units (e.g. from the elderly).</p> <p>Regardless of tenure, the loss of units does not help the homeless, mentally ill etc.</p> <p>The market will dictate size of private units. Housing needs should dictate size of affordable units. Needs larger space standards of higher densities.</p>
<b>2b. Should we allow intermediate housing providers to provide solely studio and small one bedroom intermediate homes?</b>	
<p>Comments from workshop attendees</p>	<p>It is possible for developers not to deliver any affordable housing on small sites because of the threshold level. It is better to get more smaller units than none at all. Could direct this approach to areas with lots of family housing and cap at 30 smaller units, to introduce mix of households.</p> <p>Should not allow intermediate housing at all, as this will be provided at the expense of social housing.</p> <p>Westminster's Housing Commission 2006 noted that whatever the value of intermediate housing it was better to put resources into social housing.</p> <p>People need help/incentives into work and housing. Need intermediate housing for families.</p> <p>There are still issues surrounding space issues. People over 60 generally the same space requirements as people over 20. One bed flats are still in demand, even though there is not enough family housing in Westminster, there is still growth in one bed flats for singles and young couples.</p>

	<p>Yes – This can act to meet need for young single /couples seeking to get on the housing ladder.</p> <p>Depends on whether products that are larger can be brought to the market as “affordable” Should Westminster AH fund provide additional subsidy to deliver larger intermediate homes.</p>
<p><b>Accommodating Families</b></p>	
<p><b>3a. Should we safeguard existing houses in the market sector from conversion to smaller units in parts of Westminster considered to be particularly suitable for families?</b></p>	
<p>Comments from workshop attendees</p>	<p>Sub-division into flats and re-conversion to family houses is part of the cycle of housing in London. What is important is the standard of space that results from these conversions.</p> <p>No - What constitutes family housing areas? What are the criteria's for designated areas?</p>
<p><b>3b. Do you think that in the Westminster context ‘family homes’ should include 2 bedroom 4 person dwellings?</b></p>	
<p>Comments from workshop attendees</p>	<p>There was support for this proposal.</p> <p>However, some views felt it was too simplistic and might not benefit all developments.</p> <p>It was also stated that if it is designed as just a tick box exercise then developers or families might not benefit from such a policy. Maybe designed on a case by case exercise.</p> <p>Many 2 bedroom flats will not accommodate a family because room sizes are too small.</p> <p>Should also look at bathroom provision.</p> <p>Should ask for an average habitable room ratio.</p>
<p><b>3c. Should we be asking for family sized homes in new developments in busy central areas?</b></p>	
<p>Comments from workshop attendees</p>	<p>Yes, the whole of Westminster should be for families.</p> <p>Westminster has a complex accommodation market; there are many different requirements, which need a range of solutions in different parts of the city. Central areas are not good for families, large flats in central areas are very expensive and an inefficient use of land.</p> <p>Vision for the city is paramount –don't want areas like Canary Wharf which are dead after 7pm. Want a mixed residential and business community.</p> <p>Need to recognise London is a series of communities.</p>

	<p>Demography of Westminster may need to be examined more closely as it is so diverse and complex. Families will want to live near schools and facilities and therefore busy central areas might not provide this.</p> <p>Not in areas where this could prejudice the character of the existing area.</p> <p>Where small numbers and where close to green spaces, or where opening into a courtyard behind controlled access, then family housing can work in busy areas.</p>
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## Residential Amenity

### ***4a. How should we balance protecting residential amenity with the need for growth?***

Comments from workshop attendees	<p>Health problems of homes on busy roads – traffic fumes.</p> <p>However the housing shortage means that people will still take social housing even if conditions are poor.</p>
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### ***4b. How can we ensure that new housing developments are attractive places where people want to live?***

Comments from workshop attendees	<p>Children should be considered more in designs and better standards for poorer neighbourhoods.</p> <p>Social housing tends not to as attractive as maybe private housing.</p> <p>Longmore Gardens Estate is exceptional in terms of amenities including library, schools and open space – a good model for future development.</p> <p>Ken Livingstone’s London Plan concentrates density in the centre – this is wrong, Boris Johnston is developing policy to reduce pressure and move to the outer suburbs.</p> <p>At the moment there is a requirement to provide cycle parking, which is good in theory, but it needs to be safe to cycle. Need delineated cycle paths where possible.</p> <p>Want cohesion of families. Policy should favour longer term residents and children of longer term residents.</p>
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## HMOs and Hostels

### ***5. Are there any exceptional circumstances that would justify the loss and change of HMOs and hostels to other forms of residential accommodation?***

Comments from workshop attendees	<p>There is still a need for more hostels in Westminster.</p> <p>One resident felt too many children are being separated from their families due to the lack of suitable accommodation and therefore would oppose the loss of hostels.</p> <p>HMOs &amp; Hostels should be allowed unless they are sub-standard or where there is a dominance of their uses.</p>
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## **Student Housing**

### ***6a What safeguards should we use to ensure that new student housing is just a market response to the stalling in the housing market, and a means of bypassing affordable housing requirements?***

Comments from workshop attendees	<p>A blue chip university should be already signed up to the development before the planning application is submitted to avoid future problems with letting out the dwellings.</p> <p>Educational facilities such as Imperial College are growing and will need more accommodation in the future. There is a demand but there needs to be blue chip universities signed up who can manage the sites even in holiday periods for summer schemes etc.</p> <p>Good to provide a range of accommodation.</p> <p>Should be available for further students.</p> <p>Assess the need for student accommodation with universities and work with universities to put in place management plans.</p>
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### ***6b Should normal policy requirements such as affordable housing, housing mix and parking be required in student housing schemes?***

Comments from workshop attendees	<p>No – This would make such developments unviable, when they needed to provide for low income group will be financially unviable.</p> <p>Have important educational / research facilities in Westminster such as Imperial College, St Marys Hospital, we need to support these institutions by enabling student accommodation.</p> <p>Over-concentration of student accommodation is not good, as for a substantial part of the year the accommodation is vacant.</p> <p>Blue chip universities will maximise use of student accommodation including during the holidays.</p> <p>Students tend not to own cars in London and this should not be an essential requirement in the development.</p> <p>There are also issues surrounding Cycle sheds because unless it is safe to cycle, then there is no point offering these facilities.</p>
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## **Affordable Housing**

### ***General Comments***

Comments from workshop attendees	<p>The quality of social housing compared to private housing is poor. Cited a new social housing development – windows too narrow, room sizes too small. Social housing put at the back of developments. Rents are too high.</p> <p>Payments in lieu defeats the object of providing affordable housing in Westminster.</p>
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	<p>Query use of compulsory purchase powers, especially for vacant sites.</p> <p>Affordable housing payments should be linked to earnings.</p> <p>Social rented housing is too expensive.</p> <p>Should put the needs of people who live in Westminster first.</p>
<p><b>7a. Should the proportions of affordable housing required take into account existing use value as is the case in current UDP policy?</b></p>	
Comments from workshop attendees	<p>Redevelopment of sites/buildings to provide a proportion of homes will only happen if it provides value to the developer. No new development will happen if developers are not rewarded. Need to continue to allow incentives to develop.</p> <p>Viability is not the issue, just the level of profitability to the developer.</p>
<p><b>7b. Do you support the continued use of 'staircasing' the affordable housing requirement for smaller schemes (say between 10 and 24 units or 1000 – 2500 sq m gross external floorspace)?</b></p>	
	<p>Some support for this.</p>
<p><b>7c. Should a lower proportion of affordable housing be required inside Core CAZ, named CAZ streets, and Paddington Opportunity Area, as is the case in current UDP policy, to reflect the fact that most sites in these locations can be developed for commercial use?</b></p>	
Comments from workshop attendees	<p>Should have affordable housing in deprived areas in Westminster.</p> <p>Areas like Paddington are appropriate for affordable housing.</p> <p>Paddington should be primarily commercial. Challenging to develop with requirement for 30% affordable housing, it would be impossible at a 50% requirement. Policy should not become less flexible.</p> <p>Should use the ratio that attracts the most money from the developer.</p> <p>There needs to be a flexible approach to percentages and proportions.</p> <p>No – CAZ &amp; Paddington Opportunity Area should not be allowed to provide lower thresholds of affordable housing in comparison to the rest of the borough.</p> <p>Yes – A lower proportion should be required inside the core CAZ. The question should not have let Paddington overshadow a sensible policy in the core CAZ."</p>
<p><b>7d. Do you think the Social/Intermediate split should be applied flexibly to individual schemes within an overall aim of achieving a 60:40 ratio citywide (or 70:30 as set out in the London Plan)?</b></p>	
Comments from	<p>Social housing must be the priority given the high numbers in</p>

workshop attendees	<p>temporary and overcrowded accommodation.</p> <p>Intermediate housing should not be counted as affordable housing.</p> <p>Due to the special nature of Westminster demand will always outstrip supply. 100% affordable housing does not lead to mixed communities. Intermediate housing can contribute.</p> <p>The ratio should give a higher priority to social housing.</p> <p>Some support for 60:40 split.</p>
<p><b>7e. If we were to adopt a flexible approach to individual schemes, what factors should be taken into consideration, for example should new social housing units be limited in areas which already have say more than 50% of households living in social housing?</b></p>	
Comments from workshop attendees	<p>Social cohesion is an important priority. A mix of social and intermediate units would create division. There is less scope for the provision of intermediate housing in areas with high levels of social housing.</p> <p>Do need a mix of housing, as this introduces people who demand better services and facilities, which will benefit all in the area.</p> <p>Research has shown that areas with large amounts of social housing is not good in the longer term for life consequences of residents.</p> <p>Alternative use value should be a consideration.</p>
<p><b>7f. How can we ensure Intermediate Housing is affordable to a range of eligible households, not just those in the highest income range?</b></p>	
Comments from workshop attendees	<p>RSL's have the ability to sell off their freeholds in the future, which does not help the affordable stock of homes in Westminster.</p> <p>It is difficult to sustain intermediate housing, as shared ownership can be bought out, and drift to private housing.</p> <p>Should be kept to meet continuing need.</p> <p>Have it pepper potted with social rented housing within a block.</p>
<p><b>7g. How can we ensure the affordability of service charges and car parking.</b></p>	
Comments from workshop attendees	<p>Social housing should be under council control, not housing association.</p> <p>Support national division of market &amp; affordable housing.</p> <p>Perhaps where high Service charges are unavoidable then establish value of affordable housing obligation then ask for fewer flats and get developer to set aside the balance as sinking fund to subsidise service charges or developer uses ground rent to subsidise affordable housing service charges.</p>

	<p>In the interest of long term sustainability and the fact that Westminster is in Central London, the emphasis should be to encourage people to use cars less, and use public transport, bicycles more.</p> <p>Service charges are unfairly high to subsidise social housing.</p>
<b>7h. Do you support a land value area approach to payments in lieu?</b>	
Comments from workshop attendees	<p>Support a graduated approach to payments in lieu to land value.</p> <p>Which in turn must be linked to viability.</p> <p>This may encourage development in Harrow Road and Paddington.</p> <p>The policy needs to be adaptable without too many layers.</p>
<b>Other Comments</b>	
Comments from workshop attendees	<p>Impossible to deal with population growth in the next 60 years, impossible to accommodate in densely populated areas of London. Proposing to accommodate growth outside London.</p> <p>Should address unoccupied dwellings.</p>
<b>END</b>	

**Actions:**

Chair gave undertaking for LDF officers to attend the next Housing Panel meeting and to give a presentation on the LDF / CMP