



# GET LONDON BUILDING

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# CONTENTS



<b>London needs more homes</b>	<b>2</b>
London's housing crisis	2
High rents and house prices hold Britain's economy back	2
London isn't building enough	3
What the Mayor can and should do	3
Our plan to tackle the capital's housing shortage by	3
<b>Renew London's Estates</b>	<b>4</b>
How an estate renewal revolution can build half a million homes and cut London's emissions	4
Barriers to estate renewal?	6
<b>Build more in London's best connected areas</b>	<b>8</b>
Enhancing heritage, cutting emissions, and supporting families	8
More homes in the right places	10
<b>Use London's land better</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Homes or Golf?</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Get London Building</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Endorsement</b>	<b>16</b>

# LONDON NEEDS MORE HOMES

All over Britain, people are struggling to get on the housing ladder and are stuck spending a large chunk of their paycheck on rent. It wasn't always like this. In 1990, it took the average couple looking to buy a house three years to save enough money for a deposit. It would now take them thirteen years.<sup>1</sup> Think about that – a couple doing the right thing earning the average wage has to scrimp and save for more than a decade just to afford a deposit.

Britain's housing crisis can be felt up and down the country, but it is most severe in London. To save for a deposit on a normal income would take a couple 30 years in London. Across London as a whole, house prices have risen to 12.5 times the average income.<sup>2</sup> In many boroughs, such as Hackney, Haringey, and Islington, they are 15 times average income.

Since the 90s, London has seen jobs surge by 62%, while its population has grown by 2 million. People from all over Britain and the world, including a third of all England's immigrants, come to London seeking opportunity, but housebuilding has failed to keep pace. In fact, job growth has outpaced new housing supply threefold. For every ten jobs London has added over the last decade, only three new homes have been built.<sup>3</sup>

“ Britain's housing crisis can be felt up and down the country, but it is most severe in London. ”

Homeownership is effectively out of reach for millions without the help of the Bank of Mum and Dad. In fact, the last time house prices were this high relative to the average salary, Queen Victoria was the monarch.

Saving has become harder too. Thirty or so years ago, rent payments made up around 10% of the average person's income after tax. Today, it's 30% and in London, it's 40%.<sup>4</sup>

In fact, London is so expensive compared to the rest of England that the rent on a one bed in London (£1,276 per month) is more expensive than a three bed in any other region.<sup>5</sup> Young Londoners in good jobs are now forced to choose between lengthy commutes or crowded flatshares because housing supply has not kept up with demand.

Too many homes in London are damp, cold, and cramped. High rents have forced Londoners to compromise on space – the amount of floorspace per person in London has fallen for renters from 30 square metres in 1996 to 25 square metres in 2018.<sup>6</sup>

London has some of the oldest housing stock in Europe. More than half (54%) of London's homes were built before the Second World War and old homes are more likely to be cold homes.<sup>7</sup> The average Londoner pays £996 each year to heat their home and much of that is wasted leaking out of poorly insulated homes. This is bad for the climate and bad for Londoners.

The next mayoral election is an opportunity to change this. The way to cut bills, cut emissions, and cut rents is to get building. Get building new warm homes near fast and frequent connections to good jobs. Get building on golf courses and industrial land so more Londoners can afford to stay in our great city. Get building to renew London's post-war housing estates with better homes for existing residents and new homes at social rent for local people who need it.

*Get London Building* is our practical plan for how the winner of the next London mayoral election can end the capital's housing shortage.

## High rents and house prices hold Britain's economy back

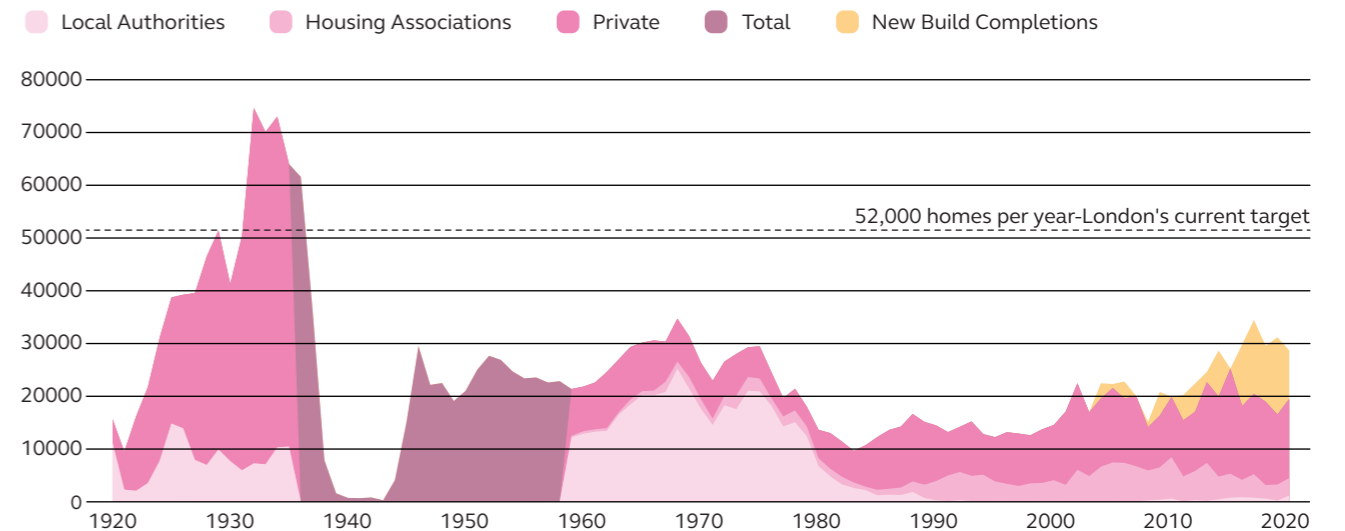
The high cost of housing is not just bad for Londoners who have to contend with cramped conditions, eye-watering rents, and sky-high house prices: it's bad for the British economy too. London is the UK's largest and best connected city. It's also its most productive city, Europe's capital for venture capital investment, and makes up just under a quarter of Britain's GDP.<sup>8</sup> In fact, an extra 1% of economic growth in London alone would produce around £2.5bn more money for public services like the NHS.

Wages in London are higher than anywhere else in the UK. In fact, Londoners earn around 15% more than the national average. Yet, people who move to London do not end up much better off. That's because they have to spend their London wages on London rents. Once you take into account housing costs Londoners only take home 1% more than people around the rest of the UK. Many people are actually better off staying put in a job that doesn't use all of their talents than moving to the capital. Britain is poorer and less productive as a result.

If London's housing costs were brought down and more people could afford to live and work in the capital, it would make the UK's economy stronger and end a decade plus of stagnation in living standards.

## A century of housebuilding in London

New homes in London broken down by builder.



This chart measures new housing completions and does not include dwelling conversions (e.g. a house being turned into flats) or changes of use (e.g. an office being used as a house). Breakdown unavailable between 1938 and 1960. There has been some debate about whether DLUHC Table 217 has undercounted homes built in London within the past decade (see *Homes in London 2020*), therefore New Build Completions have been included from 2006 (DLUHC table 118).

Chart: Britain Remade | Source: GLA Housing in London 2018, DLUHC table 217, DLUHC table 118.

## London isn't building enough

Housing in London is unaffordable for a simple reason. London isn't building enough homes and London hasn't built enough homes for a long time.

In the 1930s, London added 61,500 homes per year. Economic historian Nicholas Crafts argued that it was this housing boom that powered the UK out of the Great Depression.<sup>10</sup> Yet, London has not built more than 50,000 in a single year since.

Some argue that we don't need to build more homes. These commentators pin the blame for London's unaffordability on empty homes. Their argument doesn't add up. Just 0.7% of London's homes are left empty – a figure much smaller than in the Netherlands, where 3.6% of homes are empty or Japan, where 5.3% of homes are vacant. In fact, the most affordable parts of Britain tend to be the areas where homes are most likely to be left vacant.<sup>11</sup>

Evidence from across the world shows that building more homes of all kinds makes housing more affordable for everyone. Some argue that only affordable homes can bring down rents, but the reality is that if you don't build enough homes at the top end of the market then the people who would have moved into them still buy housing – they just bid up the price of homes for everyone.

One study of Helsinki's housing market found that for every 100 market-rate centrally located homes built, it created around 60 vacancies at the middle of the market and 29 vacancies at the bottom of the market.<sup>12</sup>

To make housing cheaper, we need to build more homes and to get more homes built, we need London's boroughs to release much more land for development.

## What the Mayor can and should do

Whoever wins the next Mayoral election needs to back the builders. As it stands, London is failing to build enough new homes to keep up with population and to improve affordability and restore the dream of home ownership, we need to go further.

Meeting and beating London's pre-war house building peak of 80,000 per year should be the ambition. Yet aiming high is not enough. Whoever wins the next Mayoral election must have a clear plan to deliver it too.

From setting London's housing strategy through the London Plan, to specific powers like the ability to make Mayoral Development Orders (MDOs) or the ability to call-in and approve major housing applications, the Mayor of London has powerful tools on hand to get more homes built.

## GET LONDON BUILDING IS OUR PLAN TO TACKLE THE CAPITAL'S HOUSING SHORTAGE BY:

**Regenerating** London's damp and cold post-war estates to build 530,000 new homes over 15 years and delivering a historic energy-efficiency upgrade to London's social housing stock.

**Building more** in London's best connected places to add 38,000 homes each year, cut congestion, and reduce London's emissions.

**Using London's land better** by allowing nature-enhancing developments on London's publicly-owned golf courses and industrial sites unlocking land for 325,000 homes.

1 Burn-Murdoch, John. (2024) "The Housing Crisis is Still being Underplayed". Financial Times.

2 Housing affordability in England and Wales: 2022, ONS.

3 McPhillips, M. & Gleeson, J. (2018). *Housing in London 2018*, Greater London Authority. Britain Remade analysis of GLA data.

4 Ibid.

5 Gleeson, James. (2023) *Housing in London 2023*. Greater London Authority.

6 Gleeson, James. (2021) *Housing Research Note 6: An analysis of housing floorspace per person*. Greater London Authority.

7 By comparison, housing stock built before World War II in selected cities: Paris (38%), New York (41%), Tokyo (1%).

8 Pitchbook data.

9 ONS.

10 Crafts, Nicholas. (2013). "How housebuilding helped the economy recover: Britain in the 1930s." The Guardian.

11 Breach, Anthony. (2021). *Why we need more empty homes to end the housing crisis*. Centre for Cities.

12 Bratu, C., Harjunen, O., & Saarimaa, T. (2021). "City-wide effects of new housing supply: Evidence from moving chains." VATT Institute for Economic Research Working Papers, 146.

# RENEW LONDON'S ESTATES

Too many Londoners live in homes that are cold, damp, and crowded. Improving the quality, not just the quantity, of London's housing stock is vital to cut bills, to cut emissions, and to cut preventable cases of ill health.

In the 1960s and 1970s, London's boroughs built tens of thousands of new council houses, but they were not built to last. Many post-war council estates are now in an unacceptably poor condition. More than half of all social homes do not meet the bare minimum energy efficiency standards that all new homes will soon be forced to meet.<sup>13</sup> Almost a quarter of council properties lack double glazing; one in 10 homes are forced to heat their home with expensive inefficient electric space heaters; and more than half (54%) lack insulation altogether.

Upgrading London's homes to be warmer and safer won't be cheap. Take Cheshire House, a 1960s tower block in Enfield, residents were left without heating and forced to take showers outdoors in the freezing cold due to a gas leak.<sup>14</sup> To bring the building up to standard would cost £54m – simply unaffordable – so the building will be demolished instead with residents forced to leave their homes.<sup>15</sup>

There's a better solution: estate renewal. Ham Close in Richmond is another poorly built 1960s council estate where residents live in cramped and unsafe conditions. Many are forced to buy expensive to run dehumidifiers to fight back damp. But, things are finally looking up for residents of Ham Close. A scheme backed strongly by residents to knock-down and rebuild the 192-home estate with 452 new homes has won planning approval.<sup>16</sup> Every existing resident will get a new home that's warmer, bigger, and most importantly, safer. Unlike often expensive retrofits, estate renewal can be done without any long-term cost to local authorities.

This is possible for two reasons. First, the capital's post-war estates were built at densities far lower than many of London's best-loved historic neighbourhoods. Marylebone, for example, is built at more than five times the density of many post-war estates. Some of London's best designed new neighbourhoods, such as Millharbour on the Isle of Dogs, reach even higher densities. Second, London's planning system is so restrictive and house prices are so high that new London homes sell for four times the cost of actually building them. This creates a massive surplus that can be used to fund the building of better quality homes for existing council tenants and a net increase in the social housing stock. It's a win-win.

Since 2018, estate renewal can get funding from the Greater London Authority when a majority of residents back it in a ballot. When given a choice, most people vote enthusiastically for a bigger and warmer home. In fact, 29 of 30 estates balloted on renewal supported it the first time they were asked.<sup>17</sup> In some cases, over 90% of residents voted to redevelop their estate.

## How an estate renewal revolution can build half a million homes and cut London's emissions

There are around 540,000 council homes in London, which together take up roughly 7,344 hectares of land.<sup>18</sup> At a density of 73 dwellings per hectare (ha), London's council estates are roughly three times less dense than Maida Vale, which is the densest square kilometre in the capital.<sup>19</sup> Maida Vale achieves high levels of density, not through imposing concrete towers, but through gentle density – attractive Edwardian mansion blocks complemented by communal gardens.

London's post-war estates were often isolated from the wider streetscape – the so-called 'tower in a park' model. This also means that euphemistically named 'green space' is typically on the outside of blocks, and hence barely used, rather than on the inside as usable shared or private gardens. Redevelopment is an opportunity to repair London's urban fabric and re-integrate communities. We can rebuild estates at much higher densities using only mid-rise housing such as mansion blocks in popular architectural styles. In fact, real estate company Savills estimate that rebuilding London's estates in this style would deliver an average of 135 homes per hectare.<sup>20</sup>

The opportunity is massive. Rebuilding London's estates at modest densities could deliver over 530,000 extra new homes on top of the 540,000 rebuilt and upgraded social homes. Aiming for even higher densities in some of London's best connected boroughs (Camden, Islington, Hackney, Tower Hamlets, Southwark, and Lambeth) could add 185,000 new homes alone and fund a bold expansion of the council housing stock to house local people stuck on the waiting list.<sup>21</sup>

As build costs are just a fraction of house prices, at sufficient densities, projects would generate a massive surplus for the council to spend on their priorities whether it is more affordable housing, more council housing, or helping local people insulate their homes. Newham council's renewal of The Carpenters estate will add 762 brand new homes at social rent for local people on top of the 314 existing social homes that are being upgraded to highest possible energy efficiency standards.

Not only will regenerating London's estates tackle the capital's extreme housing shortage and cut council housing waiting lists, it will also save money and mean fewer cases of ill health for current residents. If all new estates are built to the highest energy efficiency standards, the average council tenant would save almost £800 a year in lower gas and electric bills – a two-thirds saving.<sup>22</sup>

## Estate Renewal Ballots

■ %Yes ■ %No

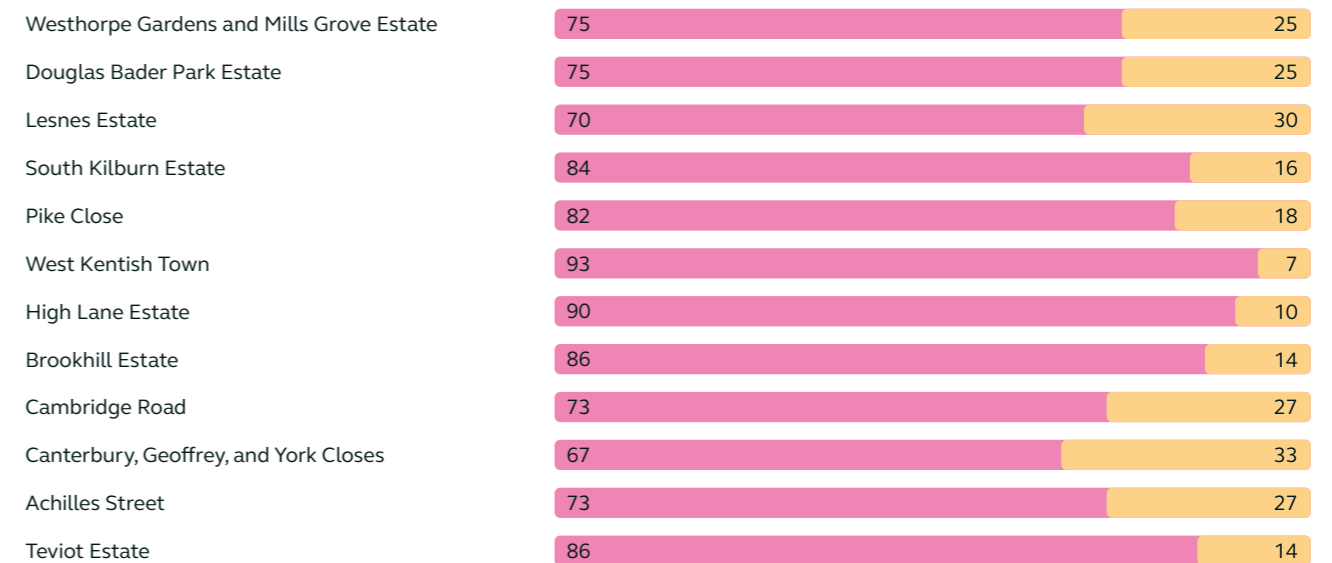


Chart: Britain Remade | Source: Inside Housing.



Before – Packington, Islington – Google Street View



After – Packington, Islington – Google Street View

13 From December 2025 onwards, all newly built homes will need to meet an EPC C rating. Britain Remade analysis of EPC database.

14 Gecsoyler, Sammy. (2022) "Enfield block residents forced to take showers in freezing cold outdoors after gas leak." The Guardian.

15 Enfield Council. (2023) *The future of Cheshire House and Shropshire House*.

16 Lillywhite, Charlotte. (2022). Richmond families celebrate as council votes to bulldoze and rebuild rotten estate. *MyLondon*.

17 In the only other case, the ballot passed a second time round when the scheme was modified.

18 Modelling from Britain Remade using data from Fol requests to London's councils and past estimates from Savills. For more information see, [britainremade.co.uk/housingmodel](https://britainremade.co.uk/housingmodel).

19 Bessis, Hugo. (2018) *Is increasing density the answer to the land-squeeze in successful cities?* Centre for Cities.

20 This is an average across London. In boroughs such as Camden, higher densities should be achieved.

21 This assumes reaching Maida Vale's density of 200 dwellings per hectare.

22 Analysis based on Lenders data on energy use at different EPC ratings, EPC database, and assumption that new homes are built to EPC A standards.

By cutting energy use in the capital, estate renewal can play an important role in reducing London's CO2 emissions. As it stands, the average council house emits 2.62 tonnes of CO2 each year. If every council house was replaced by a new home built to the highest energy efficiency standards, it would cut London's annual carbon footprint by nearly 1m tonnes – equivalent to taking almost half a million cars off the road.

### What are the barriers to estate renewal?

To supercharge estate renewal in London, the Mayor must tackle some key problems.

The pay-off from estate renewals is often massive, both in terms of new homes built and lives transformed, but these are long term projects. In the best projects no resident is forced to move twice, but this means moving more slowly in the early stages. For example, the 4,800-home renewal of Kidbrooke Village in Greenwich will take 20 years.<sup>23</sup> Even before a project has been approved, housing associations and councils must engage with residents, develop designs, and go through planning. All of this is expensive.

To combat this **the Mayor of London should create a new fund to support boroughs and housing associations to develop high-quality projects that meet the highest energy efficiency standards in partnership with residents, run ballots, and go through planning.** Due to the massive potential to cut London's emissions, **the Mayor should look at finding ways to leverage the Mayor of London Energy Efficiency Fund to provide cheaper funding.**

**The Mayor of London's office should proactively identify estates with high renewal potential and use their convening powers to get registered providers (i.e. housing associations or local authorities) to work with residents to draw up a plan.**

To further support housing associations and local authorities to deliver estate renewal projects, **the Mayor of London should negotiate the flexibility to borrow at the same rates as central government for renewal projects.** Additionally, **the Mayor should lobby for local authorities to be given more flexibility to spend any revenue generated through estate renewal on their own local priorities, whatever they are.**

It is rare that estate renewal projects are rejected by councils, but it happens. The Aberfeldy Estate in Poplar is within walking distance from Canary Wharf. The estate was built as mostly low-rise terraces before the docklands regeneration made the location much more desirable. A proposed scheme to redevelop 330 council-built homes on the site into 1,582 homes (including 447 homes at social or affordable rates) was rejected 8-0 by Tower Hamlets' Strategic Planning Committee on spurious grounds. It was blocked by Tower Hamlets councillors even though it had overwhelming support from residents with 93% voting in favour.<sup>24</sup>

Mayor Sadiq Khan has rightly used his 'call in' powers to take this decision out of the hands of Tower Hamlets to approve a project that both adds over 116 homes at social or affordable rents and helps tackle London's market-rate housing shortage near a major employment centre.

Yet while planning refusals for estate renewal schemes are rare, the planning system can still have a chilling effect. The viability of any scheme depends on how many homes can be sold at market rates. Creating new amenities for residents, increasing the share of new council housing, and delivering bold energy efficiency initiatives such as heat networks or communal heat pumps all depend on how dense a site can be. The most ambitious schemes can only succeed if they're allowed to be built at higher densities where there is a higher risk of objections and planning being rejected.

To provide certainty to housing associations and local authorities, **the Mayor of London should set clear policies on recommended densities for estate renewal projects.** In the best-connected and most expensive parts of London, high densities, including well-designed towers, should be explicitly allowed in order to ensure projects that meet the needs of existing residents can be viable. Where projects go above and beyond in delivering new affordable and council housing for local people, or in meeting green objectives, higher densities should be allowed. In lower density and less well-connected areas, mid-rise projects that reach the densities of London's best-loved neighbourhoods such as Marylebone or Maida Vale should be explicitly allowed. **The Mayor of London should commit to call in and permit any estate renewal project that wins an estate ballot and meets these encouraged densities, unless there are exceptional reasons not to.**

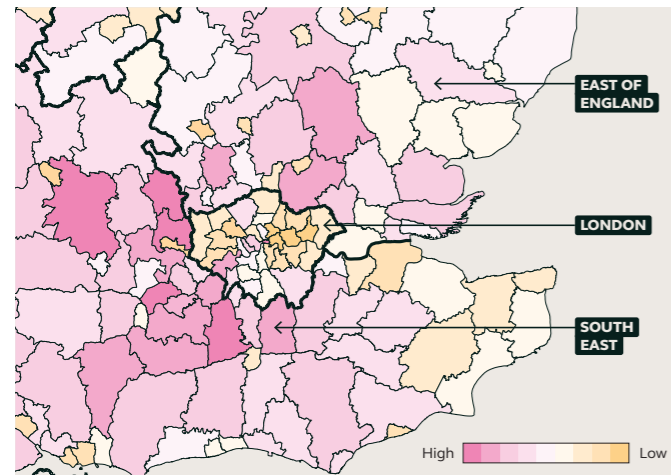


# BUILD MORE IN LONDON'S BEST CONNECTED AREAS

London's failure to build anywhere near enough homes to keep pace with job growth is not just an economic and social problem – it is an environmental problem too.

Cities are green. People living in cities emit 50% less carbon than people who don't and Londoners emit less carbon per person than people in any other part of Britain.<sup>25</sup> There's a simple reason why: London is by far Britain's best connected city. Every day, Londoners make more than 10 million journeys on TfL's buses, tubes, and trains, while only 42% of London households own a car.<sup>26</sup>

Transport isn't the only reason that Londoners' carbon footprints are smaller. Londoners are more likely to live in flats or terraced housing, which use less energy than a detached suburban home. In fact, purpose-built flats use around a third of the energy a detached house does because shared walls cut heat loss.



Carbon Footprint London<sup>27</sup>

Making it easier for more people to live in places with good transport connections allows us to boost growth and cut emissions at the same time.

Yet Paris, Madrid, and Milan all have areas that are more than twice as dense as the densest part of London.<sup>28</sup> Worse still, some of the best connected parts of London, where owning a car is a choice rather than a necessity, are built at extremely low densities. Even in Zone 1, it is not uncommon to see streets where not a single house is taller than three storeys.

“ Some of London's densest parts are also some of its best-loved. ”

## Enhancing heritage, cutting emissions, and supporting families

Some of London's densest parts are also some of its best-loved. Think of the rows of six-storey terraces and mansion blocks in Kensington, Maida Vale, and Bloomsbury. The same is true of the apartment blocks of Hausmann's Paris and Cerdà's Barcelona, and of the tenement houses of Edinburgh and Glasgow.

It is possible to build up and enhance London's heritage. For example, a forward-thinking move by the Borough of Kensington and Chelsea allowed a row of terraced houses in a Conservation Area to add an extra mansard floor without applying for planning permission so long as they were in accordance to a local design code and built with solar panels on top.

Imagine what would be possible if this approach was applied across London. Create Streets estimate that if just 10% of the 4.7 million pre-1919 homes in England added mansard floors, it would create almost a million new bedrooms without a single demolition being necessary.<sup>29</sup> As a fifth of all of England's pre-1919 homes are in London, this suggests 200,000 new bedrooms in London assuming the same uptake. Not only would this allow more people to live and work in London, but the property value uplift would help homeowners to fund ambitious retrofits that would be otherwise prohibitively expensive. **The Mayor of London should set a clear policy in the London Plan to permit mansard extensions. The policy should specify that Grade II listing or Conservation Area status should not prevent additions, where there was a local tradition of mansard construction when the building was erected and it enables retrofits on otherwise hard-to-decarbonise buildings.**

Gentle intensification along similar lines can help meet London's need for more family homes. In South Tottenham, Haringey councillors worked with community leaders to tackle extreme levels of overcrowding affecting the Hasidic community, where a lack of large family homes in the area meant that many families had children living four to a bedroom. Haringey Council implemented a policy allowing Victorian terraced houses to add 1 and half storeys subject to a strict and detailed design code that ensured extensions were in keeping with the area's heritage. As the policy was aimed to tackle overcrowding and support large families, it did not apply to Houses in Multiple Occupancy (HMOs). Analysis by Create Streets found that 200 properties (out of total 1,000 affected) took advantage of this new freedom.<sup>30</sup> **The Mayor should extend the South Tottenham approach across London and empower homeowners. The Mayor can do this by creating a presumption in favour of development for sympathetic single-storey upward extensions when they are in keeping with the building's original designs and improve the building's energy performance.**

25 Quinio, V., & Rodrigues, G. (2021). *Net zero: decarbonising the city*. Centre for Cities.

26 Mahmud, Zarin. (2023). *Understanding car ownership in London*. Centre for London.

27 Minx, J., Baiocchi, G., Wiedmann, T., Barrett, J., Creutzig, F., Feng, K., ... & Hubacek, K. (2013). Carbon footprints of cities and other human settlements in the UK. *Environmental Research Letters*, 8(3), 035039.

28 Quinio, V., & Rodrigues, G. (2021). *Net zero: decarbonising the city*. Centre for Cities.

29 Hughes, Samuel. (2021). *Living Tradition*. Create Streets.

30 Hughes, Samuel. (2021) *Learning from History: Suburban Intensification in South Tottenham*. Create Streets.



### More homes in the right places

New Zealand offers a model for how London can cut emissions and get more homes built. In 2020, Jacinda Arden's government forced six major cities to allow more housing. The new rules required councils to automatically approve any building up to six-storeys within walking distance of the city centre, commercial hubs or rapid transit stops.<sup>31</sup> The rules also banned councils from forcing new developments to have a minimum level of parking. It is too early to assess the impact of this policy, but the number of new homes built from a similar Kiwi policy in Auckland bodes well. The Auckland Unitary Plan, which passed in 2016, doubled housebuilding in the city and shifted where new homes are built away from sprawling car-dependent suburbs to existing built-up areas with good public transport connections.<sup>32</sup>

What was the impact of Auckland's housebuilding boom on ordinary people? A recent study found that rents were a third lower than they otherwise would have been due to the reform.<sup>33</sup> Think about that – a third lower: if the same happened in London rents, it'd be a £6,000 saving for a young family renting the average two-bed. London should follow New Zealand's lead. **The Mayor should rewrite the London Plan to explicitly allow up to six-storey developments near the capital's best connected sites.** The next London Plan should resurrect a modified version of the Small Sites policy proposed in the Draft London Plan 2019. The policy proposed a presumption in favour of development on small sites within 800m of a railway station or town centre, or was otherwise well-connected.<sup>34</sup> The policy insisted upon no net loss of green space (a ban on so-called 'garden grabbing'), did not apply on heritage sites, and did not apply to buildings more than 10 storeys tall. It also required that boroughs insist on area-wide design codes to ensure developments are attractive.

If implemented by the Greater London Authority it could have boosted London's housing supply by at least 25,000 homes a year. Yet, the policy was dropped after Planning Inspectors intervened arguing the approach was "too far too soon".<sup>35</sup> London's persistent failure to deliver enough homes, the drop-off in supply from large developers (in response to higher interest rates and uncertainty around new building safety regulations, such as second staircase rules), and stronger green belt protections in the NPPF should prompt a rethink.

Unlike complex large brownfield sites, small sites can be built by small local builders supporting local employment. Crucially, unlike large sites, small housebuilders do not have to worry about holding back properties to avoid flooding the market – simply put, they get homes to market quicker.

To allow more people to live near the best connected parts of London, **the Mayor should include a new Small Sites policy in the next London Plan. There should be a clear and strong presumption in favour of development provided it meets the following conditions:**

- it is no more than six-storeys (plus an additional mansard floor, where appropriate) or the average height of a street, whichever is higher;
- it is within walking distance of tube or rail station, or is otherwise extremely well-connected,<sup>36</sup>

- all redevelopments and extensions must significantly improve energy efficiency by including solar panels or low-carbon heating options such as heat pumps, where appropriate. This requirement does not apply to extensions to buildings that have already seen extensive efficiency upgrades;
- the site is no more than 0.25 hectares in size and less than 25 units;
- it is not on Green Belt land and there is no net loss of green space;
- it is built to a design code developed in consultation with local people that pays care to the architectural heritage of London.

To alleviate fears that it will lead to 'too much, too fast', **the London Plan should permit individual streets to opt out of the policy for a 20 year period when 75% of households choose to do so.** Houston, Texas adopted a similar approach when it densified its urban core.<sup>37</sup> While some neighbourhoods opted out, the policy still led to the construction of an additional 25,000 new homes and helped Houston keep rents low.<sup>38</sup>

Producing design codes for London's diverse architectural traditions is an innately hard task and with local planning departments experiencing significant cuts over the past decade, there are questions over delivery. **To ensure that this Small Sites policy creates beautiful and popular new homes, the Mayor of London should work with the Government's new Office for Place to develop a Design Code toolkit for London's borough.**

One key barrier that small builders face is the rising cost of preparing a planning application. Across the UK, the share of homes delivered by SMEs has fallen from four in ten in 1988 to one in ten now.<sup>39</sup> At the same time, navigating the planning system has become more expensive and complicated. Lichfields estimate the cost of getting planning approval for a moderate development has, adjusted for inflation, risen fivefold to £125,000. Lichfields report notes that "validation lists now typically stretch to 30 separate assessments, and come with guidance notes that can exceed 100 pages."<sup>40</sup>

To reduce the amount of red tape that SMEs face, **the Mayor should strongly encourage local authorities to implement Local Development Orders (LDOs).** Under this model, development is automatically approved as long as it meets strict conditions set out in the LDO. **Where boroughs have failed to meet their housing requirement under this policy despite having high potential for density, the Mayor should use Mayoral Development Orders to eliminate unnecessary bureaucracy for small builders.**

In the future, **when boroughs benefit from new transport infrastructure such as new stations or receive more frequent services due to network upgrades, the Mayor should require boroughs to produce Local Development Orders that deliver higher levels of density. If boroughs LDOs fail to fully realise the opportunity for new homes then the Mayor should intervene directly and use Mayoral Development Orders.**

There is a massive opportunity to meet London's housing need and cut emissions through gentle densification. It is possible to build an extra 134,000 homes by merely reaching terraced house density within walking distance of just 25 of London's tube and train stations, all without touching an inch of Green Belt.

31 West, Eleanor and Garlick, Marko. (2023) Upzoning New Zealand. *Works in Progress*.

32 Greenaway-McGrevy, R., & Phillips, P. C. (2023). The impact of upzoning on housing construction in Auckland. *Journal of Urban Economics*, 136, 10355.

33 Greenaway-McGrevy, R. (2023). Can Zoning Reform Reduce Housing Costs? Evidence from Rents in Auckland.

34 TfL measures connectivity with a score from 0-6. For example, most of central London has a PTAL of 6.

35 Barrett, Roisin, Fieldhouse, William, and Smith, David. (2019) *Report of the Examination in Public of the London Plan 2019*. The Planning Inspectorate.

36 For these purposes, we define well-connected as having a PTAL score of 5 or above. PTAL is a measure of connectedness used by TfL from 0 to 6 where 0 is worst and 6 is best.

37 Martin, Anya. (2023) Houston, We Have a Solution. *Works in Progress*.

38 Gray, M. N., & Millsap, A. A. (2023). Subdividing the unzoned city: an analysis of the causes and effects of Houston's 1998 subdivision reform. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 43(4), 990-1006.

39 Lichfields. (2023). *Small builders, big burdens*.

40 *Ibid*.



# USE LONDON'S LAND BETTER

London needs more homes, yet in some parts of the capital all new development is effectively banned. This land is not protected because it is environmentally valuable. In fact, it is some of the least biodiverse land in London. Nor is it protected because it hosts anything of particular heritage value. Rather, it is protected because it is explicitly reserved for industrial use. Land within short walking distance of multiple tube stations is reserved for Amazon warehouses, car rental drop-offs, and self-storage facilities.

Around two-thirds of London's industrial land is protected by Strategic Industrial Location and Locally Significant Industrial Site status. The London Plan effectively bans all housing development on such sites and restricts the ability of councils to release land adjacent to industrial sites.<sup>41</sup> The policy is designed to meet London's "Industrial Need", which is another way of saying it is there to provide valuable real estate to businesses at below-market rates. Across London, residential land values at existing densities are typically three times higher on a per sq m basis than industrial land.

Take the Park Royal Industrial Area, which is a vast collection of warehouses surrounded by 11 underground stations and the Acton Mainline Station on the Elizabeth line. It contains more than 338 hectares of land within walking distance of a tube station and soon the UK's largest and best-connected rail hub Old Oak Common (10 minutes to central London on the Elizabeth Line). If just the part of this site that was within 10 minutes walk of a tube or train station was developed to Parisian densities (400 dwellings per hectare), it could deliver 135,000 new homes. **To grasp the one-off opportunity presented by Old Oak Common, the Mayor should de-designate all parts of the Park Royal Industrial Area within walking distance of tube or rail stations and use a Mayoral Development Order to permit car-independent development at Parisian densities on the site.**

In addition to Park Royal, if we released all the remaining Strategic Industrial Land within 10 minutes walking distance of a station for development at terraced house density, we could build 157,000 new homes for Londoners.

The arguments for banning development on Strategic Industrial Locations do not add up. It is true that Strategic Industrial Locations are the workplace for tens of thousands of Londoners, but it does not follow that their jobs would disappear if the site was redeveloped. Some industrial users would move out of London to cheaper parts of the UK, while others would find ways of co-locating with housing as happens already.

Likewise, it is true that having an Amazon warehouse nearer to a population centre will, all things being equal, lead to fewer miles travelled by delivery drivers. Yet this must be balanced against the much larger reductions in household emissions that can be achieved by building dense green housing within walking distance of tube stations.

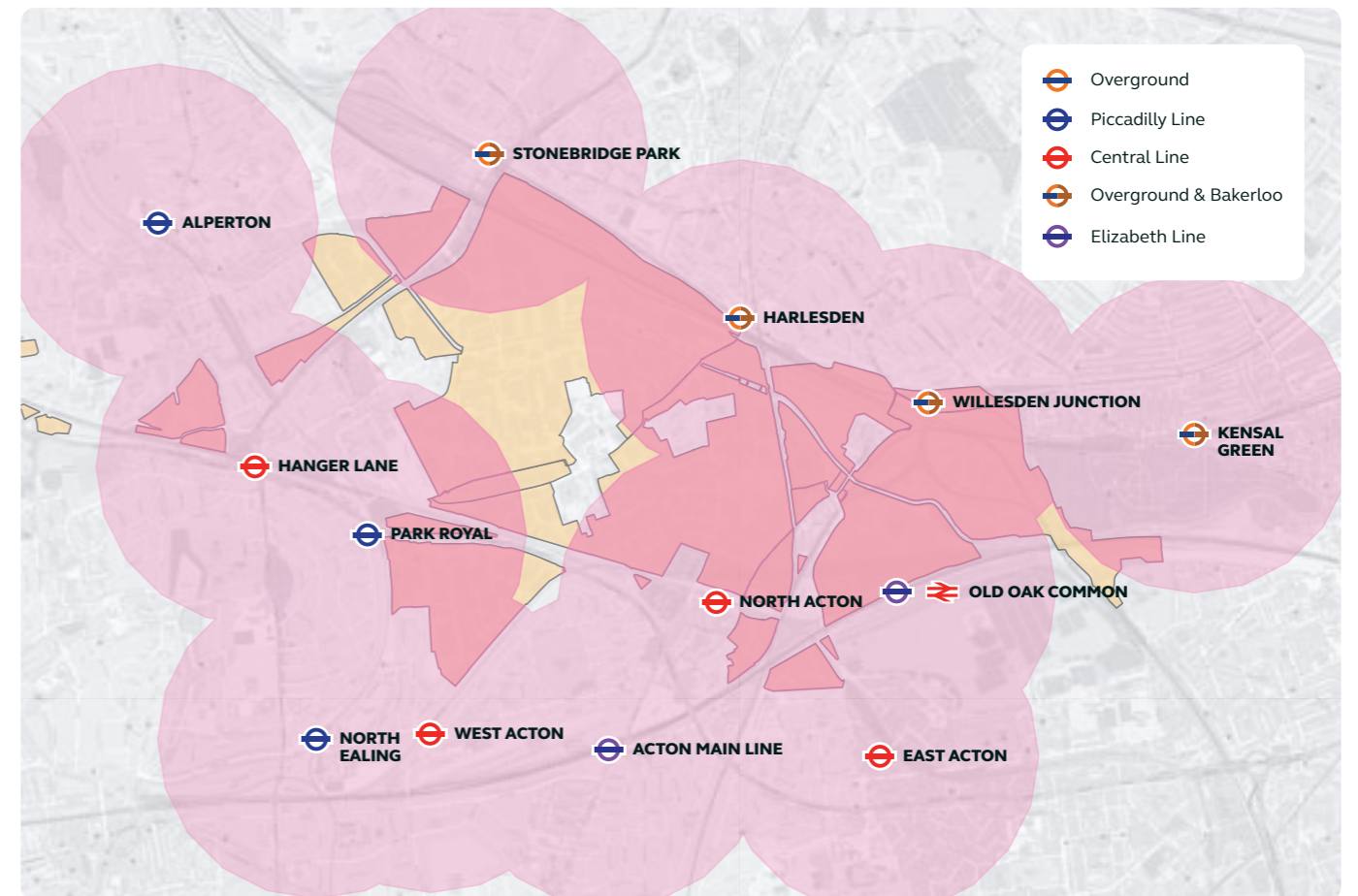
Industrial land swaps can allow for re-development of industrial sites without reducing the amount of space available for businesses. For example, Enfield council's Meridian Water development aims to deliver 10,000 homes near a newly-built rail station. Half of those homes would be delivered on Strategic Industrial Land. Enfield proposed de-designating that Strategic Industrial Land and compensating for the loss by providing new industrial land nearby with better road access. However, the de-designation was refused and 5,000 homes cannot be built as a result.<sup>42</sup> There is significant potential for allowing riverfront developments on previously industrial land and replacing it with land better connected to the strategic road network.<sup>43</sup>

**To boost homebuilding, the Mayor should explicitly support councils swapping Strategic Industrial Land to sites with better access to the road network. The Mayor should also actively identify sites unsuitable for brownfield development with good access to the strategic road network to facilitate SIL swaps.**

Co-location helps preserve industrial workspace while unlocking new land for housing. However, co-location can be expensive and can threaten the viability of a scheme when combined with the London Plan's 50% affordability requirement for industrial land. **The Mayor should modify the London Plan to permit higher densities on industrial sites when it makes co-location viable.**



Park Royal Industrial Area, much of which is just a few minutes walk from 12 stations



Park Royal Industrial Area SIL and stations within a 10 minute walk

41 Housing developments can be permitted if they "they are part of a strategically co-ordinated process of SIL consolidation through an opportunity area planning framework or borough development plan document."  
 42 Allin, Simon. (2023). "Setback for Meridian Water as industrial sites remain protected." *Enfield Dispatch*.  
 43 McLaren, Lydia and Richards, Matt. (2023). *The London Land Challenge; Balancing Residential and Industrial*. Savills.



# HOMES OR GOLF?



Proposal from the RCKa architectural practice showing re-development of half of a publicly owned golf course in Enfield.

If all of London's golf courses were a borough, they would be the 15th largest – roughly the size of Brent.<sup>44</sup> Can we really justify forcing so much land to be used for golf when almost half of London renters are struggling to make monthly payments?

London's 95 golf courses (excluding driving ranges and courses with fewer than 9 holes) take almost as much land as all other sporting activities combined. There are also a further 74 golf courses just outside London too. More of London is dedicated to golf than to football, despite the fact that many times more Londoners play football than play golf on a regular basis.

A large proportion of London's golf courses are publicly-owned. In fact, if London's publicly owned golf courses were a borough, they would be larger than Hammersmith and Fulham. Yet councils get little in return as they lease them to golf clubs on the cheap. For instance, one golf course pays just £13,500 in rent to Enfield council for 39 hectares. That's £3,000 less than it costs to rent a one bed flat in Enfield.

Some golf courses are on the edge of London and are surrounded by nature – making them inappropriate for development – but more than 1,420 hectares of golf courses (including 565 hectares of publicly owned golf courses) are within walking distance of train or tube stations, busy bus routes, and town centres. Building on just half of these sites at terraced house densities would deliver more than 30,000 homes, while allowing the rest to be turned into genuinely open spaces for Londoners to enjoy nature, walk their dogs, and exercise.

Development on golf courses is typically restricted due to two designations, Green Belt and Metropolitan Open Land. Yet while golf courses are green spaces, unlike parks they are only open to a small number of people at any time. In fact, architect Russell Curtis calculates that London's parks on an average day see around 83 times as many visitors than a similarly sized golf course operating at full capacity.<sup>45</sup> Nor are golf courses havens for biodiversity – fairways and greens are deliberate monocultures.

It is possible to build new homes and create new nature-rich green open spaces for locals when developing on golf courses. One proposal from the RCKa architectural practice shows how re-developing half of a publicly owned golf course in Enfield could unlock 650 new mid-rise homes while creating new biodiverse wetlands, cycle routes, and allotments.<sup>46</sup>

**The Mayor should update the London Plan to allow developments on the capital's golf courses and remove Green Belt and Metropolitan Open Land designation, if they meet the following conditions:**

- they are within walking distance of a tube or train station within regular services into central London;
- the proposed redevelopment meets a 25% net gain in biodiversity;
- new homes meet the highest standards of energy efficiency include on-site energy generation where possible;
- an increase in genuinely public outdoor space and sporting facilities.

London needs more homes built in well-connected areas, yet development is restricted on industrial land near soon-to-be four tube stations and the capital dedicates a borough the size of Brent to golf. Using London's land better can unlock 325,000 good homes within walking distance of public transport, bringing affordable housing to working people who are being priced out of our capital.

44 Curtis, Russell. (2021). *The Golf Belt: How sustainable development on London's golf courses can help address the housing crisis.*

45 Ibid.

46 RCKa. (2023). *Holes to Homes.*

# GET LONDON BUILDING

Housing in London doesn't have to be unaffordable. It is a choice. Far too long, we have chosen not to build enough to meet demand.

London's strong economy will always draw people in, but high rents and house prices are pushing lifelong Londoners out.

The next mayoral election is an opportunity to change this.

**It is time to make a different choice.  
It is time to choose to build again.**

Let's renew London's estates with warmer and bigger homes for existing residents, more homes at market rate, and more homes at social rent to ensure local people aren't priced out.

Let's take advantage of London's world-class transport network by building attractive higher density housing within walking distance of train and tube stations to cut emissions and enable more Londoners to live near the best jobs.

Let's allow London's industrial land and golf courses to be put to better use providing homes and new green spaces for Londoners.

**It's time to get London building.**

# ENDORSEMENTS

“Get London Building is one of the most fact-based, common sense reports on how to tackle the capital’s housing crisis. Each of the recommendations warrant cross-party support and moves to implement them as soon as possible.”

**Chris Worrall**

Housing Columnist, LeftFootForward

“Solving the housing crisis and the climate crisis must go hand in hand. There are real opportunities to improve London’s housing stock through renovation and retrofit, as well as building new, efficient homes which cost less to run. This is good for the environment, good for the economy, and good for our health.”

**Juliet Phillips**

UK Energy Lead, E3G

“London is the epicentre of the UK housing crisis. Britain Remade’s manifesto offers exciting solutions that could deliver significant numbers of extra homes across the capital, significantly improving the lives of current and future Londoners.”

**Freddie Poser**

Director, Priced Out

“London has impressive job opportunities but as Britain Remade has laid out here, growth is held back by the housing shortage. This report contains many ambitious policy options that can change that and should win cross-party support. Building more homes in London is the key to higher wages, more innovation and higher economic growth – delivering better public services and lower carbon emissions.”

**John Myers**

Director, YIMBY Alliance

“High housing costs in the capital make it harder to start and grow a business. If the UK doesn’t act and implement the bold policies set out in this report, we could lose our status as Europe’s VC capital.”

**Philip Salter,**

The Entrepreneurs Network

“This excellent paper sets out a detailed and pragmatic plan to boost the supply of low-carbon homes and create denser, more sustainable communities in our capital city. The proposals to encourage more estate regeneration schemes are a particularly innovative way to improve the energy efficiency levels of draughty social housing through private finance, while expanding the overall number of homes. The next Mayor should take up these proposals to alleviate London’s housing shortage and reduce emissions.”

**Sam Hall**

Director, Conservative Environment Network

“Those living in the draughtiest homes are unfortunately often those who can least afford to waste energy so tackling the poor energy efficiency of social housing, including London’s post-war estates, is particularly important. In addition to improving the daily lives of residents, with buildings remaining the UK’s second highest-emitting sector, a programme to improve energy efficiency in these properties would make a major contribution to cutting London’s carbon emissions and making further progress towards reaching the UK’s climate change targets.”

**Emma Pinchbeck,**

CEO, Energy UK

“Like the rest of the country, London has been under delivering on new housing for many years and the social and economic implications are becoming ever more evident. If we are to deliver the homes London desperately needs we urgently need brave action from politicians at a national, local and mayoral level. Housing in the capital remains unaffordable for many households, compounded by high energy costs from heating old, inefficient housing stock. Building more energy efficient new homes will allow young people to live and work in our capital, support business growth, reducing travel times and allowing London to remain a world leading city.”

**David O’Leary,**

Executive Director, Home Builders Federation



Britain Remade is a campaign for economic growth. We believe that a core issue holding Britain back is that it is too hard to build things in this country. We want to reform the planning process to deliver more clean energy projects, transport infrastructure, and new high quality homes.



[BRITAINREMADE.CO.UK/GETLONDONBUILDING](https://BRITAINREMADE.CO.UK/GETLONDONBUILDING)