



Housing Densities & Urban Impacts in Brent

Report of Task Group

January 2006

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FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report presents the findings of the Task Group set up to consider issues relating to housing density and urban impacts in Brent. It provides an overview of the various submissions to the Task Group by Council officers, papers prepared by elected Members and presentations by those involved in the development of new housing. A wide range of issues were examined and views expressed on the topic, and this report sets out the findings of the Task Group and identifies practical responses on matters ranging from the layout and design of new housing to its management.

The findings and recommendations proposed in this paper are offered for discussion and ratification by Overview.

Findings of the Task Group

From the work of the Task Group a number of key findings emerged:

- Building design is of fundamental importance in developing sustainable and successful new communities but this should not be the preserve of planners and architects. Other agencies and interests including housing managers and Members can also make an important contribution and, as importantly, the needs of the owner/occupier are central to the consideration of the location, design and layout, occupation and management of new housing schemes, particularly those at higher densities.
- Higher density housing is not inherently problematical – physically, socially or environmentally. However, there is a legacy of poor quality schemes from the 1960's (particularly of social housing) and lessons learnt need to be applied.
- Developing housing at higher densities is not, of itself, the only 'solution' to addressing the scale of housing need and demand in Brent/London. There needs to be parallel investment in infrastructure and better utilisation of existing (empty) property.
- Policy on housing density should be applied flexibly in response to locational characteristics (e.g. access to public transport and services) – one size does not fit all.
- Design quality, from site layout and planning to architectural details, is of fundamental importance in developing successful high density housing projects and needs to be sympathetic to the needs of the owner/occupier as well as its urban context, but that management and allocations policy also need to be addressed particularly on affordable housing schemes.
- Measures of housing density by themselves can be a crude planning tool. They do not, however, reflect build/environmental quality nor the experience of residents.
- When public sector tenants are offered more choice as to where they might live, even if this causes delay, satisfaction with their new home is greater. The European experience demonstrates that choice reduces housing management problems.
- To qualify for access to public sector housing necessitates the applicants to have economic constraints and their choices are compromised by only being given one offer due to lack of availability of surplus accommodation.
- Choice is crucial for tenant satisfaction. For choice to be possible there has to be a supply of units in excess of demand, preferably by at least five percent. Size, design and location have to cater for people with different needs.
- Communal areas only work if the community adopts these spaces as their own and share them collectively. The areas must be kept safe and have secure and restricted access, otherwise, they can become derelict and potential areas for crime.
- The majority of high density housing schemes being planned are for families with children. This requires consideration of the specific needs of these families.

Key Recommendations

Housing Policy and Design – the Council's approach to housing density (from the location, layout, design, maintenance, participation of tenants and other stakeholders to the management of new housing) must be tailored to the needs of the potential owner/occupier, be they single people, families with children, disabled or elderly. It is not a 'one size fits all' solution. People feel well disposed to attractive buildings. Residents will feel privileged, proud, happy and content to live in well designed, managed and maintained developments with obvious results. Living in badly designed and poorly maintained and managed housing is dehumanising.

Specifically:

1. The Council should aspire to meeting the needs of the individual to the greatest possible extent. New homes should be the best possible given available resources. For example, as far as possible families with children should be housed on the lower floors of developments, with access to open space they can call their own. This objective should be championed by Members as well as Officers across the Council.
2. Brent's housing policy should be suitable for the varying needs of its residents. Current policy is driven by the numbers of families in temporary accommodation.
3. Housing densities need to take account of the available/planned infrastructure required to support the development – schools, jobs, transport, utilities, etc. On larger schemes appropriate services and facilities should, where possible, be provided on site.
4. Housing densities need to relate to the scale and density of the surrounding area. Site layout and design details must avoid bland and uninspiring architecture that detracts from the local environment. Poor design can stigmatise large scale housing schemes particularly in the affordable sector.
5. As part of the emerging Area Action Plan preparation process the Council should review development opportunities (in town centres and around transport interchanges) where higher density housing development would be appropriate.
6. The Council should undertake a review of SPG17* and of its Design Guide to encourage innovation and creative solutions in new housing schemes.
7. The Council should reject poor or mediocre designs.
8. The Council should consider seeking adoption of the Building Research Establishment's EcoHomes standards for all new and refurbished housing, public or private, as a way of promoting sustainability. These same standards should be applied to the 'decent homes' programme.
9. The design and planning of high density housing should take into consideration not only immediate housing needs, but also needs in the future 20-50 years.
10. Rental/mortgage pepper potting, i.e. mixing of different tenures in the same building, is neither sensible nor appropriate and should be avoided. However, each building within a development should have similar tenures and be managed with innovation and imagination. All buildings in a mixed tenure development must be managed and maintained to similar standards to ensure community building and cohesion.
11. Residents must always be involved in management and maintenance issues. Residents associations, committees, etc. are just a few examples of how community participation can be ensured for the benefit of all.

12. The 'public sector image' should be avoided at all costs. Quality of internal design, lettings and management is of paramount importance to residents in the new development. The quality of external design is also significant to residents in the surrounding areas.

Housing Management and Funding – housing management including allocations and lettings policy is a key factor in many successful high density developments, particularly affordable housing projects. Allocation policy is a more critical issue in higher density housing than in lower density. Accordingly:

13. The Council should work together with housing associations and the Housing Corporation to develop policies that reflect best practice on issues of housing allocations, lettings plans and child density levels. There should also be public recognition, perhaps by awards, for successful and innovative management methods.
14. There appears to be a case to review the working of LOCATA to assess whether everyone that uses it has an opportunity to exercise 'real' choice. Higher density new build will obviously increase the supply side and thereby increase choice. Letting plans should be reviewed with RSLs and the West London Housing Strategy Group to ensure that the widest range of choice is available to all groups of tenants.
15. This task group report should be considered in conjunction with the report of the Empty Properties task group to ensure the best results for bringing vacant property into use.
16. Brent, through the West London Housing Strategy Group, should initiate discussion around the case for increased public investment in infrastructure and affordable housing.

1. INTRODUCTION TO THE ISSUES

1.1 The Challenge

1.1.1 The Government plans 200,000 new homes in the Thames Gateway in the next 15-20 years, 60,000 of which will be in the London sector of the Gateway. The government's policy is to increase build in the area where there is the greatest demand, effectively to bring a balance to supply and demand. Brent's UDP proposes a net addition of at least 13,510 additional homes between 1997 and 2016 of which at least 4,800 should be affordable. These new homes will be provided principally through new build, with building at higher densities – a key aspect of national, regional and local planning policy – making a significant contribution to achieving these numbers. Demand for housing has changed over the past twenty years and this needs to be taken into consideration at policy, planning and implementation levels. It is not however just a question of the quantity of homes to be built but also quality. If genuinely sustainable communities are to be developed these new homes need to be better designed and offer a higher quality of sustainable, socially inclusive and affordable accommodation and amenity.

1.1.2 Raising housing densities across the board however is not the complete or only answer. Achieving a more sustainable pattern of development through higher densities needs to be focussed in areas with (or the potential to accommodate) high quality public transport services as well as appropriate social and community facilities, employment opportunities and associated infrastructure and utility supplies. Delivering successful and sustainable communities also requires careful planning, high quality design and effective management with the needs of the owner/occupier central to the process. A key aspect of meeting the challenge is to be aware of the issues, to have appropriate policies and processes in place to address them and to ensure that they are implemented in all new housing developments.

1.2 Housing Densities & Urban Impacts Task Group

1.2.1 Given this context a Task Group was set up to consider issues relating to housing density and urban impacts in Brent in terms of policy planning and development as well as project implementation and management [see Appendix 1]. The group comprised Councillor Freeson, Councillor Van Colle and Councillor Kabir supported by officers from Housing, Regeneration, Planning and Policy.

1.2.2 This report provides an overview of the various submissions to the Task Group by Council officers, papers prepared by Members and presentations by those involved in the development of new housing. Combined with research and reading around the subject and a site visit to the Bedzed development in Sutton (a sustainable housing project developed by Peabody) the Task Group was able to build up extensive knowledge and understanding of the issues relating to housing density.

1.2.3 This report reflects the wide range of views expressed and issues raised during the Task Group's work. It aims to balance the various inputs received and provide a practical analysis of the issues and possible responses. Some of these responses are beyond the current remit of the Council (or which current policy and guidance is able to deliver) but nonetheless the Task Group considered they were important and merited reporting to the Overview Committee.

1.3 Report Structure

1.3.1 **Section 2** considers the material reviewed by the Task Group and issues of land use planning, housing management and sustainability issues and **Section 3** sets out the key findings of the Task Group.

1.3.2 A summary of the terms of reference and overall approach of the Task Group is set out in **Appendix 1** and the policy framework that is informing approaches to housing density at the current time in **Appendix 2**. Further background information on housing density is set out in **Appendix 3**.

2. HOUSING DENSITY: ISSUES FOR REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

- 2.1.1** Where people are able to exercise choice in where they live they will make trade-offs between different features of their housing, its location and environment. Attitudes to the physical characteristics of housing – such as home type and the provision of gardens and car parking – appear more important than density figures per se and most people find it irrelevant to talk about where they live in terms of housing density levels, instead they relate to the characteristics or experience of their environment. In other words it is not simply a matter of housing density, but rather a combination of factors that combine to create life experiences and inform perceptions. For example, lack of sufficient personal space restricts optimal development of individuals, especially for families with children.
- 2.1.2** A house is a physical entity while a home is very much more to the individuals who inhabit it. This concept needs to be taken into consideration from the conceptualisation, design and planning stages.
- 2.1.3** Private housing works differently from the public sector and this idiosyncrasy should be taken into consideration when developing policy, planning, etc.
- 2.1.4** From the research it is also apparent that housing density is an imprecise indicator of residential environmental quality and has limited correlation with residents' perceptions of quality. For example, the 'Quality of London's Residential Environment' survey (LPAC, 1994) found the highest public approval ratings were for pre-1919 terraced housing – a high density form of development which is only exceeded by some of the mid-20th century flatted estates. Yet there are areas of lower density housing which for reasons of location, planning, services and management provide a poor environment and are unpopular. Interestingly, housing densities in London are relatively low in comparison to other large European cities, for example Paris, which overall has a much greater population per square kilometre than London but which some consider affords a superior environmental quality.
- 2.1.5** Accordingly the discussion around housing density needs to be informed by qualitative considerations that reflect the experience of residents and providers of housing. A more holistic view of the issues regarding housing density and, as importantly, its impacts is therefore required if the Council is to make informed decisions regarding current and future policy and in its consideration of planning applications for new housing development.
- 2.1.6** This report is not intended to present the case for higher densities, nor assume that increasing housing density is the appropriate solution to providing sufficient numbers of new homes to meet forecast need in all situations. Rather the report seeks to identify the issues associated with developing housing at higher densities as well as those elements that contribute to successful schemes and sustainable communities. Many of the issues and responses are common to the affordable and private housing sectors and accordingly measures to ensure that the Government's drive to increase housing densities delivers high quality schemes need to be applied to both private and affordable housing projects. There are particular issues, such as housing management that require particular attention in the affordable sector and these need to be taken into account when planning and implementing new affordable housing projects.

The elderly and the disabled are becoming significant groups in public sector housing. Their specialised needs require to be taken increasingly into consideration, i.e. ground floor accommodation. Public policy supports the principle of the elderly continuing to stay in larger family homes. This inevitably limits the supply of much needed larger accommodation.

2.2 Issues Associated with High Density Housing

2.2.1 Issues of housing density tend to generate strong views. In terms of public attitudes to housing, surveys have found that:

- 80% of people leaving their present home prefer to go to a house with a garden.
- 75% of single people want a garden.
- people in less dense areas express greater satisfaction than those in high density areas.
- people in lower densities perceive more community spirit and have more local friends.
- lower density living means fewer complaints about people's environments.
- the most common complaint about urban areas is the lack of green space.

2.2.2 On this evidence there would appear to be a clear preference for 'suburban' living. Part of the explanation for this preference is that high density housing is often regarded as synonymous with poor housing conditions and living environments – initially the 19th century 'tenements' and latterly 'system built' high rise housing estates. The history of high-density, particularly post-war housing development in the UK is typically one of un-popular, fragmented communities with poorly designed public spaces and facilities. Much of the resistance to the idea of increasing housing densities appears therefore to stem from concerns that the problems of the 1960's might be repeated, with high rise blocks in unsuitable locations and sites where roads have been designed first and houses after, and with poor sense of place and poor amenities for residents.

2.2.3 This general antipathy towards high density housing needs though to be balanced with the findings of research which shows that there is public support for density increases in the context of saving greenbelt and countryside (Tunstall, 2002). In addition evidence from European cities such as Barcelona, Paris, Berlin, Prague, Amsterdam, Lisbon and Edinburgh demonstrates that high density development can provide a desirable and sustainable model for urban living. Likewise the popularity of 19th century terraced houses such as those of Kilburn Park and the mansion flat blocks in Willesden – which often actually have much higher densities than unpopular estates associated with 'high density' housing – indicate that well planned, well designed and well built higher density housing has the potential to provide a desirable living environment.

2.3 Design Considerations

2.3.1 Much research has been carried out on what contributes to 'good design' and what creates attractive, liveable and successful neighbourhoods. This is as much about the detail of a scheme such as materials, windows and entrances, as the larger scale considerations such as layout, building orientation and overall architectural treatment.

Getting these right is essential to developing housing which is sensitive to the needs and aspirations of future owners/occupiers and which is compatible with local, regional and national policy objectives on sustainability and the environment. If well located and planned, as well as individually designed and properly managed, then high density housing can provide an attractive and popular housing environment. Too often a combination of inappropriate siting, bland and uniform design and poor quality materials create an environment that adds nothing to an area and can very quickly become stigmatised as residents choose not to live there. There are numerous examples of architectural 'successes' of one decade being the problem estates of the next.

2.3.2 In terms of location then access to transport, jobs, schools, shops and community facilities is critical, whether in place or planned as part of a large scale development. Locations close to major transport interchanges and with good standards of amenities and services – such as town centres – are therefore suitable for higher densities. Whether this is at 200+ habitable rooms per hectare (50+ dwelling per hectare) identified by The Task Group or up to 700 habitable rooms per hectare as indicated in SPG17 will be dependent on a range of considerations about the site (its location, accessibility and character) and the scheme itself (unit size, parking provision, design and management). Thus developments at the highest density (700+ habitable rooms per hectare) are likely to be more suitable in highly accessible locations with an existing urban character, providing smaller units suitable for young people in single person or childless couple households for whom ground floor accommodation is not essential, with low levels of parking (reflecting good public transport accessibility) and with high on-site management.

The future changing housing needs of single people or childless couples requires careful consideration. If they choose to have children later then these families should then be housed in larger accommodation on lower floors with appropriate amenities.

2.3.3 For families with children more suburban locations are likely to be more popular and appropriate and there is still scope for increased housing densities in these locations. Ideally, families with children should be housed in the lower floors of any development with access to well designed and safe play areas located at the heart of the development. Whilst concerns about localised congestion, increased noise disturbance and loss of light, sunshine and sky views may lead to resistance to infilling of plots and 'backland development' and replacing large gardens with flats, generally this can be resolved through careful site planning, building design in context with its surroundings and careful attention to the provision and management of private and communal outdoor space.

2.3.4 In both situations – which together characterise much of Brent – higher densities can be successfully achieved through sensitive and creative urban layout, and better and more imaginative building design. What is also clear from the evidence is that housing density needs to be applied flexibly – one size does not fit all. Thus a general imposition of very high densities for family housing (the Task Group suggested this might be 70+ dwellings per hectare/280+ habitable rooms per hectare) is considered inappropriate, whereas a lower density (Members suggested 40 dwellings per hectare/200 habitable rooms per hectare) is likely to be more acceptable.

2.4 Other Ways of Meeting Housing Need

2.4.1 Increasing housing supply through raising residential densities is not only a question of large scale new housing schemes as there is the potential for re-using existing

under-utilised or empty stock plus the contribution of small infill sites. In terms of the potential contribution of empty properties this is particularly relevant in locations more suitable for higher density development such as town centres, transport nodes, and other places with well provided social and economic infrastructure (schools, hospitals, work places). There are around 1 million empty homes nationally – 95,000 in London – of which some 20% (16-18,000 in London) represent market turnover at any one time. This gives around 76,000 empty properties in London which, if one assumes an average of 2.35 persons per household (as per the London Plan), have the potential to accommodate over 200,000 people.

- 2.4.2** In Brent (and allowing for market turnover) the figure is approximately 3,155 empty homes with the potential to house around 6-7,000 people. Many of these properties are above shops in town centres – a survey identified some 300 properties in the Willesden High Road area alone – and to date about 300 empty properties in Brent have been refurbished and returned to use with Council grants. Theoretically, returning empty properties to use would match the number of households Brent Council is accommodating in temporary housing – about 3,500. In addition, there are redundant empty commercial buildings with the potential for conversion. Given this situation a focus on ‘repopulating’ town centres through refurbishing existing properties and providing for small households could make a useful contribution to meeting housing need without requiring new high density housing to be built. This could also have the additional effect of easing market pressure to convert family houses with gardens to small units, helping to maintain balanced communities as well as having a beneficial impact on community and commercial services in the town centres by introducing new demand from residents.
- 2.4.3** In terms of the mechanism for bringing empty property back into use, Members were of the view that consideration should be given to the properties being leased by the local authority and housing associations in order to provide additional affordable accommodation. This though is a potentially costly option (both in terms of leases and ongoing management) and would require considerable further work to establish how feasible such an approach was.
- 2.4.4** Another area where higher densities are being achieved without major new (high density) housing being built is through the extension (and sometimes redevelopment) of existing private homes and conversion of houses into flats. For example, a typical weekly list of planning applications proposed 332 additional dwellings by redeveloping minor existing commercial and residential buildings. The same list of applications showed 57 intensifications of use (i.e. increase in number of habitable rooms) by extensions, garage and loft conversions. Another typical list showed 45 additional rooms by such extensions. Such examples should be treated cautiously but if typical then annualised and allowing for ‘carry over’ of applications in planning negotiations they might produce about 5,000 additional habitable rooms and flats (1-2 bedroom) in Brent over (say) two years – a significant increase in housing density without new housing units being built. On present experience, increased habitable rooms per hectare by extensions and loft conversions seem likely to continue by up to 700 habitable rooms a year.
- 2.4.5** Higher density developments are also proposed nationally as part of the solution to meeting Government targets on housing the homeless. For example, from April 2004 the target is to have no families in bed and breakfast accommodation, and certainly for no longer than 6 weeks. Local demand for affordable housing is currently very high and there are both quality and availability issues to be addressed. In the view of the Task Group given the intensification of use already underway through small building schemes and conversions and the potential offered by re-use of empty properties the question arises whether achieving additional housing numbers through new build at

high densities should be the only approach or whether there should be a combination of actions. Growing pressures from the rising number of single persons in Brent as well as the pressures of homelessness, overcrowding and shortage of properties could be eased if higher density policy embraced a more vigorous empty homes strategy in relation to flats over shops and houses as well as exploring the potential for more efficient use of Council properties (for example using loft space) and adding floors to small and medium-rise blocks of flats.

- 2.4.6** Notwithstanding the contribution that such 'existing' sources of additional housing can make to providing additional housing units, Task Group concluded that the scale of the need for additional housing – of all tenures – is such that higher density housing will account for a large proportion of new units.

2.5 Housing Management

- 2.5.1** It is clear that high quality design is fundamental to creating attractive environments but also that housing management including allocations and lettings policy is a key factor in many successful high density developments. Whilst certain issues are particular to the affordable housing sector there are some basic principles that are relevant irrespective of tenure. In terms of the scale of the management issue in the affordable housing sector nationally about two thirds of council and housing association properties are houses with the remainder being medium to high-rise blocks of flats with common areas, entrances, lifts, staircases, landscaped and play areas, car parks. It is primarily flats which need a high level of management via caretakers, contractors, concierges or residents on site, and in the social-rented sector allocations policy needs to be considered carefully if problems are to be minimised or avoided.

- 2.5.2** Of particular importance is the age profile of the resident population in terms of mix, their location within a development and the facilities available for them. Research has found high child densities to be one of the most negative factors in people's experience and perceptions of high density – typically high-rise – housing. Importantly this is problematic from a child's as well as adult neighbours' point of view, and often exacerbated as these children becoming a large cohort of adolescents growing up simultaneously in an area often without adequate amenity and other outlets for the high energies of this group.

- 2.5.3** Effective management does impact on scheme costs and service charges. Accordingly, there is a case for housing managers to be involved in the planning and design of new high density housing schemes (particularly in mixed household schemes). This would assist in identifying how management issues can be addressed for example through the location of family units on lower floors with access to private amenity space. In parallel there needs to be a mechanism in place, possibly through the service charge, for occupiers to take responsibility for their private and communal amenity space.

2.6 Sustainability

- 2.6.1** In line with Government policy the use of brownfield land should take precedence over greenfield sites. Such an approach should enable existing road and rail systems to be utilised, thereby eliminating the necessity to establish or extend transportation systems. Whilst the cost of regenerating brownfield land is higher than that of developing a greenfield site due to the additional costs associated with demolition of old buildings (and in certain cases the removal of contamination and/or obstacles) this

'penalty' is invariably counterbalanced by the significant savings that can be achieved by utilising established services, roads and existing public transport services.

2.6.2

Sustainable construction methods and features are increasingly important in building design. These include passive solar design, high insulation, well-sealed doors and double/triple-glazed windows, efficient heating systems, efficient lighting and appliances, renewable energy systems for heat and electricity, combined heat and power on larger schemes and recoverable waste water. In terms of the scope of recycling of materials, about a third of UK waste is generated by the construction industry and of this one third is recycled for aggregate and fill material, but this amounts to only 17% of the aggregates and fill material used and only 4% is recycled for high grade uses. Accordingly minimising waste and maximising recycling has the potential to significantly reduce materials going to landfill with potentially beneficial effects in terms of reduced costs of construction and damage to the environment. Accordingly consideration should be given to formal guidance being prepared on this – perhaps backed by a 'Considerate Builders Scheme' – to encourage:

- re-use of existing buildings
- recycling of demolition material and re-use of tiles, bricks and aggregate materials on site
- dealing with contamination on site rather than 'exporting' problem material
- specifying materials with a high recycled content such as aggregates and timber board products
- segregation of waste during construction
- the use of prefabrication when possible to reduce waste
- avoiding composite materials.

2.6.3

Whilst it is acknowledged that these measures are not currently required by statutory planning, building or other regulation they are included in the Building Research Establishment's optional environmental EcoHomes assessments which planning authorities can encourage developers and housing associations to use. One of the other standards in the EcoHomes assessment is the provision of three bins for recyclable waste inside a dwelling to be designed into a dedicated space. Also of relevance is the Housing Corporation requirement for an EcoHomes Pass level for all social housing receiving grant from April 2004, to be raised to a Good level in 2005. Providing for segregated waste is one of several ways to achieve the pass level and in the view of the Task Group the Council should consider seeking adoption of the standards for all new and refurbished housing, public or private, as a way of promoting sustainability as well as be applied to 'decent homes' programme for 9,000 Council-owned dwellings managed by Brent Housing Partnership. Other approaches include:

- using waste or biomass to fuel local combined heat and power or district heating schemes serving neighbourhoods (eg, Bedzed in the London Borough of Sutton and schemes in Paris, Denmark, Sweden and Moscow)
- putting biodegradable waste down sink waste disposal units and using the drainage system to transport it – though this would significantly raise loads on sewerage works
- providing recycling centres within five minutes walk of dwellings (i.e. less than one kilometre apart) – a desirable planning condition for large developments such as Stonebridge, Church End, Roundwood, Chalkhill, North Wembley, Wembley Central, South Kilburn.

2.6.4 Costing these 'proposals' and establishing their feasibility was beyond the scope of the Task Group's remit and therefore further work will be needed if this is to be taken forward as a recommendation to the Council.

2.6.5 The case for higher densities on the grounds of sustainability and discouraging the use of the private car is, for some, a controversial proposition. Locating higher density development in areas well served by public transport can promote the use of and sustain public transport services as well as discourage car use. However this is not the same as car ownership. Notwithstanding Government policy to discourage private car use in the view of the Task Group the promotion of 'car free' developments (particularly in the affordable sector), preventing off-road parking and the introduction of Controlled Parking Zones needs further consideration on the grounds of equity and personal choice for prospective tenants.

3. KEY FINDINGS

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 The density (or intensity) of urban development enables the provision of a wide range of community and recreational services and facilities which in turn contribute to a high quality residential environment. In parallel it is clear that good design is of central importance in delivering quality housing, irrespective of density. The issue of developing at higher densities though raises additional and specific issues at all stages of the development process from pre-planning and consultation to implementation and management.

3.1.2 Good quality schemes should provide higher densities in the appropriate urban, demographic and physical context, and be planned on sound social, environmental and quality of life grounds. In the view of the Task Group well-designed high density housing – even from the years of poorly 'designed' industrialised building which characterised some mid-1960's municipal housing estates (and private commercial and residential buildings) though none of them 'high-rise' – provide useful lessons for the planning and development of new housing schemes. Some London examples of higher density housing developments identified by the Task group were:

- Lillington Gardens, central London – local authority scheme built 1968-72 comprising 540 mixed size flats on 3.46ha site with private and communal gardens, shops, pub, community hall and medical centre. Density 156dph/680hrh. Excellent transport.
- Odham's Walk, central London – local authority scheme built 1979 comprising 102 mostly 1 and 2 bedroom, with some 3-4 bedroom flats on 0.6ha site with courtyards, health and day centres, shops and offices. Density 154dph/523hrh. Excellent transport.
- Churchill Gardens, central London – local authority scheme built 1952-61 comprising 1,800 mixed size flats in 6-11 storeys, maisonette and terrace housing on 12.48ha site with schools, shops, communal facilities. Density 142dph/557hrh. Transport excellent.
- Abs Cross Gardens, Havering – local authority scheme built 1966-74 comprising 230 mostly 1-2 bedroom flats/maisonettes and some 3 bedroom houses and one tower block on 2.83ha. Density 81dph/257hrh. Transport good.
- Whitbread Estate, Islington – housing association scheme built in the 1970's comprising 138 1 and 2 bedroom flats on 0.48ha site. Density 287dph/754hrh. Transport excellent.
- Other examples include Coin Street Cooperative, London's South Bank; BedZed, Sutton; Peabody, Paddington Basin; Greenwich Millennium Village; ex-Jewish Free School site, Camden.
- Local examples include Cavendish co-operative, Kilburn; Kilburn Square co-operative Willesden Lane/Mapes House maisonettes; Cambridge Road maisonettes; Queen's Park St Laurence Close; Network and PCHA central Willesden schemes; Rosedene, Brondesbury; Alan Preece and John Barker Courts, Willesden; Frontenac and Wells Court, Willesden and South Kilburn; Dunbar, Saville and adjacent schemes. South Kilburn; various 1960's Wembley schemes; Chalkhill low-rise housing, Wembley.

3.2 Design Quality

3.2.1 Government guidance encourages high quality design and the use of design statements to explain the context for a scheme's urban design and architectural response. Annex C of the current draft Planning Policy Statement 1: Creating Sustainable Communities (replacing PPG1) states that "local planning authorities should not attempt to impose a particular architectural taste or style arbitrarily. Design policies and guidance should focus on encouraging good inclusive design and should avoid stifling innovation, originality or initiative. Policies and guidance should recognise that the qualities of an outstanding scheme may exceptionally justify departing from them." From another perspective, Kate Barker in her review of housing supply ('Delivering Stability: Securing our Future Housing Needs') has recommended that the house building industry work with the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) to agree a code of best practice for the design of new houses. Where planners and developers disagree on specific design issues, Barker recommends that arbitration involving CABE be used to resolve matters.

3.2.2 Part of the debate around design quality and housing density relates to general design issues that apply to all schemes, whether high or low density and built for or by the private or public sector, though the problems can be magnified on larger scale high density developments. Unfortunately there are too many examples of new housing developments that present uniform and bland architecture resulting in a poor environment both visually and functionally. The planning system it appears is unable and/or unwilling to reject schemes that are mediocre and as a consequence a number of poorly planned and designed schemes have been developed.

3.2.3 This is in part down to the skills and resources available within planning authorities to challenge poor designs – Brent has recently appointed an urban designer to address this skills gap – but there can also be difficulties in over-riding recent precedents that set a low standard but used as a benchmark by prospective developers. For the architect, cost considerations and constraints are often cited as the explanation for what emerges as bland design, but there has also often been a lack of attention to detail – whether to materials and finishes or landscaping and public/private space. More generally there has often been a lack of vision and aspiration on the part of housing developers (both private and public sector) to deliver housing of the highest quality, and a lack of genuine consultation with prospective occupiers.

3.2.4 Design is not however, of itself, the 'solution' to creating successful and sustainable communities but rather part of a more complex system where due consideration needs to be given to the existing and future demography of an area, the quality and availability of public services and social environment, as well as long term property management issues. Nonetheless, high quality design – both for individual housing schemes and their settings – is a fundamental ingredient to successful higher density development, the urban renaissance and sustainability.

"The difference between liveable and unliveable high density neighbourhoods is design. Design is about giving order and beauty to space, while taking into account social and environmental imperatives." – Lord Rogers, Chair of Parliamentary Group on Architecture and Planning Urban Task Force 1998 quoted in The Times, 22nd January 2004.

3.2.5 In this context the Task Group therefore identified a number of important aspects of overall scheme design that should inform architects, planners and providers when preparing and assessing proposals for high density housing:

- being aware of key design features that can reduce perceived density. These include small developments within larger schemes, greater spacing between buildings and direct sight and travel lines from homes to open spaces. Designs should also aim to achieve privacy for occupants, have a small numbers of homes using the same entrance use and introduce mixed elevational treatments to add variety.
- flexibility of use should be built into new housing at the design stage. Buildings can last for hundreds of years while populations and occupancy levels shift over time, and accordingly designs should seek to accommodate (through adapting the number and use of rooms) use by families with children, single people, young couples. Building to Lifetime homes standards enable greater flexibility, particularly for the disabled, infirm and elderly.
- there may be a place for 'offsite' construction (prefabrication) and other modern construction methods to meet current thermal insulation requirements of the Building Regulations as well as offering the potential for better quality, lower cost and timely delivery of products.
- schemes should meet Secure by Design standards, and wherever possible Parker Morris standards should be sought.
- as densities increase, so amenities should increase through the provision of more recreational and open space per dwelling. Balconies should be provided, (where feasible) where there is limited access to gardens. Consideration should be given to storage space, sound insulation and size of windows. Private spaces as well as public and semi public are important, especially where it is harder to provide people with private gardens at ground level.
- schemes should design out criminal opportunities as far as possible. Good design can also prevent unpredictable or unwanted encounters with people who may not be friends or relatives, can provide maintenance of privacy and can avoid the creation of excessive stimulation or sensory overload.
- car parking should be secure and reflect lower levels of ownership where appropriate and possible. Car clubs may offer some solutions.
- consideration should be given at the design stage to encouraging developers to put recycling facilities into new build schemes.
- high quality specifications need to take account of the objective of achieving a long term reduction in maintenance and management costs.

3.2.6

In terms of more detailed design considerations the Task Group acknowledged the potential value of a 'design guide' on new housing and identified a number of areas for inclusion:

- the creation of overlooked enclosed space. (inner courtyards, and windows overlooking spaces can promote a sense of community contact, and security).
- the creation of overlooked public space and pedestrian routes.
- the limitation of vehicular penetration to the community.
- the provision of houses and flats with courtyards and or balconies, south facing where possible.
- the formation of convenient links with the existing street pattern and existing public transport.
- the formation of links with shops/schools/amenities.

- the retention of any valuable natural site features, trees/parks.
- the grouping of dwellings where sunlight penetrates dwellings and public spaces.
- the creation of housing which reflects a 'human' scale (referring to the identification or articulation of individual dwellings, avoiding long identical or faceless facades or monumental forbidding structures, and breaking up long facades with features such as variable roof lines and visible individual front doors).
- the introduction of colour and variety in the materials used .
- the introduction of varied hard landscape (paving, bricks, cobbles) and soft landscape (trees, grass, low shrubs).
- careful selection of street furniture – from necessities such as dustbins and lampposts, to other items such as handrails, railings and benches. Bollards may be a less visually imposing way of keeping pedestrian areas safe.

3.2.7 In addition the Task Group considered that the quality of planning application material could be significantly improved to enable a proper assessment of its design and likely impact and to limit the scope to 'dumb down' the design at a later stage in the project. Specifically proposals for new housing should be well illustrated and to a much higher standard than previously received. For example with current technology it was considered feasible to use computer generated images to establish the type of environment that would be created to enable the public and committee members to understand and assess the quality of design proposals. Although under current Government guidance it would be difficult to legally require their submission, on larger schemes in particular streetscape 'walk through' sketches and graphics should be sought from applicants. Together these measures could in turn accelerate the process of granting planning permission. Members of the Task Group were also of the view that, with or without this material, if after a preliminary assessment applications fail to demonstrate a coherent design concept they should be returned to the applicant prior to validation with requests for further detail. In addition further consideration should be given to how planning applications are assessed, using bed spaces and habitable rooms (as well as dwellings per hectare) as well as consideration being given to likely intensity of use based on tenure mix.

3.2.8 Given this context an area for review and refinement is the Council's design guidance set out in SPG17. The operational experience of SPG17 has indicated the need for further consideration and possible refinement in a number of areas including:

- reconsideration of the current presentation of the 600 metre 'Pedshed' (walking distance from town centres or rail stations);
- elaboration of the existing townscape character;
- distances between dwellings;
- the socio-environmental impact of larger housing developments to include an assessment of: existing open space provision and potential for enhancement; current and projected child population densities (including possible 'child capping' through restricting new housing types in specific areas); the capacity of existing community facilities, schools, health etc.
- consideration to be given to enhancing current requirements in respect of: enhanced internal space and layout including stacking and sound insulation; enhanced and better designed external amenity space – particularly usable balconies, terraces and roof gardens for flats where this is not detrimental to

townscape character and existing amenities; enhanced hard and soft landscape design features and materials; maximum floor height location for family flats in multi storey blocks.

3.2.9 The review of SPG 17 – to be undertaken as an integral part of the preparation of the new style Local Development Framework (which will statutorily replace the UDP) – is intended to focus around how to maximise new housing development, required to meet pressing Borough and regional needs, in a sustainable manner that does not cause unacceptable detriment to existing amenities and environmental character. This review of SPG 17 will be informed by a number of research studies of Brent housing developments to identify key common design features and management practices that have enabled the provision of successful, sustainable residential communities. Key to this review is the understanding that higher density housing requires consideration of a number of matters which if not satisfactorily addressed at the design and planning application determination stages could potentially cause significant problems with consequential detrimental impact on amenities and environmental character.

3.3 Housing Management

3.3.1 The management – of property, public realm, allocations and tenancies – is cited as being of key importance in successful high density schemes from both the UK and Europe. Where increasing populations are placed in close proximity then good on-site management can address and alleviate many of the potential problems. Effective management has an associated and equally important dynamic of ensuring codes of behaviour amongst residents are respected and there is mutual compliance, which is particularly important in higher density developments. In addition good management can enable residents to feel empowered as to how their development is run and provide a secure point of contact and process for resolution when problems occur.

3.3.2 Whilst this report does not distinguish between private or affordable housing – as the principles of housing/site management should be the same for all tenures – in acknowledging some of the management problems that have occurred in social-rented schemes, attention should be focussed on improving management arrangements of affordable housing in general. An important part of management relates to allocations policy, occupancy levels and lettings plans and the Council should work together with housing associations and the Housing Corporation to develop policies which reflect best practice on issues of housing allocations, lettings plans and child density levels. More specifically, the Task Group considered that there should be a presumption in favour of houses or ground floor maisonettes for families. Where exceptionally family flats have to be provided, good quality communal, and where possible, private open space should be provided. Additionally, the Council and its arms length management organisation (Brent Housing Partnership) should consult with residents, private developers and housing associations to enable self-management by cooperative and co-ownership schemes where practicable.

3.3.3 Some best practice noted by the Task Group includes:

- lettings plans that enable landlords to manage household mix – a common approach in some European countries – involving all parties (including the local authority) agreeing at the outset the proposed range of household types to be accommodated on a scheme in order to achieve a balanced and sustainable community. Whilst not a static situation, lettings plans should consider the balance of householder type, taking into account occupancy levels, intensity of use, child densities and tenancy histories.

- lettings plans that replicate the profile of more mature schemes are cited in the academic research studied as preferable for high density schemes. Although there are huge pressures in London to house homeless families with children, research has found that child numbers need to be managed carefully. Schemes that have been found to be more successful in the long term have tended to have reduced child densities (at around 18% of total residents) and higher proportions of older people without children. Whilst not advocating a maximum child density, this issue needs careful consideration at the design stage and where young children are housed adequate amenities for play need to be made available. In this regard, Brent Council Housing department is currently undertaking a trial pilot study with Genesis Housing Association on managing child density as an estate is occupied. The aim is to allow for a degree of under-occupation in the short term, though not to sustain this in the medium term, on the basis that as an area becomes established it will be able cope better with higher densities.
- mixed tenure appears to be a key factor for success, and a strong trend exists in various European countries to increase integration between owner occupied, privately rented, cooperative housing, subsidised sale and subsidised (affordable) housing.
- lettings systems in Europe appeared to have a far greater element of choice for applicants than in the UK – a key factor in resident satisfaction. Choices related to location, size of accommodation, rent levels and waiting times. Although certain waiting times were very lengthy, resident satisfaction was clearly increased by choice.
- successful schemes invariably have a very local management presence. Cited as a key success factor in Europe, the management:resident social compact is very strong with little backlog for repairs and graffiti removal and high importance was placed by landlords on maintenance with anti social behaviour being dealt with quickly.

3.3.4 Further findings on housing management – aimed primarily at housing associations but also having relevance to private developers where mixed tenure and mixed use schemes are planned – include:

- management policies should be agreed at the planning stage of a scheme and proposals drawn up with housing managers, especially where more than one landlord has a presence on a site.
- in the case of mixed use and mixed tenure schemes involving a private developer, the lease conditions should be the same for all residents. Consideration should be given to using a single management provider for all residents irrespective of tenure.
- residents should be involved and consulted about management, particularly on plans to develop the community on their estate.
- the establishment of residents associations representing all tenures should be encouraged.
- consistent and accurate information needs to be collected regularly on scheme management costs, child densities and the economic circumstances of current residents.

3.3.5 Good management invariably increases the cost of a scheme and its maintenance, impacting on rents and service charges. Rent guidelines should therefore take into account the cost of management and the impact of potentially higher service charges

in high density schemes in order to maximise affordability. For housing associations the rent chargeable will largely be dictated to by government policy, so is less likely to be affected by additional management costs.

3.3.6 In the light of these findings the Task Group supported the engagement of Brent Council with other local authorities in the West London Housing Strategy Group and beyond in trying to widen choice for residents in social housing. More specifically the Task Group were of the view that the Council should consider public recognition, perhaps by awards, for successful and innovative management methods.

3.4 Sustainability

3.4.1 A series of specific measures have been identified that would improve the sustainability of new housing projects. It is fair to note however that Brent as a Council is at the forefront of translating sustainable development principles and aspirations into action. SPG19 *Sustainable Design, Construction & Pollution Control* promotes the principles of sustainable development and, importantly, also provides detailed guidance on matters such as energy and materials conservation, environmental protection and conservation.

3.4.2 SPG19 is a material consideration in determining planning applications for proposals meeting or exceeding specific thresholds, including housing schemes of 10 or more units. All developments meeting the thresholds are expected to comply with the guidance and applicants are required to submit a completed 'Checklist Form'. This provides a scoring system to assess the degree to which a scheme addresses various issues including land use (e.g. brownfield/ greenfield development); location (e.g. public transport accessibility, traffic generation, facilities for pedestrians and cyclists); meeting social and economic needs locally (e.g. amenity, secure by design, community participation); design (e.g. energy conservation and efficiency, renewable technology, materials); development impacts (e.g. during construction and operation). This approach makes applicants (and officers) more aware of what sustainable development means; allows the likely effects of proposals to be identified and potentially improved; integrates sustainable design objectives with other environmental and socio-economic objectives in the UDP; and provides a 'level playing field' for the assessment of relevant schemes.

3.4.3 These principles have relevance to a number of the issues around housing density identified by the Task Group and also need to be integrated with other policy and guidance to ensure that new housing schemes genuinely embrace and deliver on sustainable development objectives.

Appendix 1.

Terms of Reference
Approach
Background Documents

1. Terms of Reference

The Task Group, part of Brent's Overview Committee, was set up to review and develop existing policy and strategies on housing densities. The terms of reference were (in no particular order):

- What are the design values that create sustainable urban communities, while achieving the necessary higher densities? This would include size and scale of individual units, the use of communal areas and facilities.
- What is the potential effect on other social and economic facilities?
- What can we learn from housing development in comparable European cities?
- What are the implications for all types of housing, both private and affordable across all parts of the borough?
- Will future developments need an increase in the quality and intensity in the role of on site management to make them successful?
- How can the people's dislike of higher density housing development be overcome?

2. Approach

Identifying good practice

Systematic examination of extensive research and case studies available through Housing Corporation reports such as 'Capital Gains', 'Housing densities in Europe', 'Perceptions of privacy and density in housing', and 'Housing density: What do residents think.'

Interviews and Presentations

Chris Walker. Director of Planning

Martin Cheeseman, Director of Housing

Barry Munday PRP Architects

Charmaine Young St Georges Developers

Irene Bannon and Alan Beatty from Genesis Housing Association.

Site Visits

Site visit by some Councillors with the Planning Department to the Bedzed development to understand issues surrounding high density and sustainability.

3. Research Papers and Background Documents

Commission For Architecture and Built Environment: 'By Design'

Design for Homes: 'Perceptions of Privacy and Density in Housing'

Joseph Rowntree: 'Urban Housing Capacity'

Llewellyn-Davies: 'Sustainable Residential Quality; New Approaches To Urban Living' & 'Exploring The Potential of Large Housing Sites'

London Housing Federation: 'Capital Gains'

Mayor of London: 'Housing For A Compact City'

Mayor of London: 'The London Plan'

Mayor of London: 'A City of Villages: London's Suburbs'
Mayor of London: Housing Commission Report
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: 'Sustainable Communities'
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: 'Planning Policy Guidance Note 3'
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: 'Urban Task Force Report'
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Planning Green Paper - delivering a fundamental change
PRP Architects for East Thames Housing Group: 'High Density Housing In Europe: Lessons for London'.
Rebecca Tunstall (Dept Social Policy LSE): 'Housing Density What do residents think?'
The London Housing Strategy
Brent UDP
SPGs for Local Town Centres - proposal from Planning Committee to Overview, referred to the Task Group
Cllr Freeson: Chair's Densities and Urban Impact Paper
Cllr Sandra Kabir: The Social Impacts of Higher Densities Building
Cllr Irwin Van Colle: Design Values in High Density Housing
Director of Planning: Policy Context Paper
Director of Housing: Policy Context Paper

Appendix 2.

Context

The Scale of the Challenge

The Government plans 200,000 new homes in the Thames Gateway in the next 15-20 years, 60,000 of which will be in the London sector of the Gateway (a London Development Agency study suggests this figure could be increased to 91,000). The housing target in the London Plan is for a minimum 35,000 new homes each year from 2002-2016, of which at least 17,500 should be affordable homes, requiring capital resources of about £150 million each year – well above current public investment. Brent's UDP proposes a net addition of at least 9,650 (480 per year) new dwellings between 1997 and 2016 (13,510 including vacancies and non-self-contained dwellings) of which at least 4,800 should be affordable.

Particular Issues for Affordable Housing

The situation in the social-rented sector is particularly challenging. For the first time in 60 years the UK's total number of rented dwellings is markedly down, due mostly to the sharp fall in the number of social-rented homes over the past 20 years – a fall that is continuing today. Specifically, since the introduction of compulsory local authority sales under Right to Buy, 1.7 million rented homes have been lost nationally from the social-rented sector. In London the figure is over 250,000 of which 4-5,000 have been in Brent and whose losses continue at 2-300 a year – a figure higher than the UDP-calculated new housing provision for the period 2000-2010. Losses London-wide are 4-5,000 a year. These figures, plus transfer of private rented stock to owner-occupation, represent the biggest reduction in rented homes for over a half century – from 11.5 million to 7.5 million.

Given the need to increase the number of affordable units across London there are a number of issues relating to the provision of such housing that require specific consideration including the policy, financial and legal framework within which affordable housing is to be provided and Brent's role and influence on this. The following outlines the new legislative context within which affordable housing operates. Historically the overall level of Approved Development Programme (ADP) available to the Housing Corporation was agreed by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM). The subsequent allocation of resources by the Housing Corporation to housing associations was conducted on a borough by borough basis (in consultation with each borough) with the subsequent nomination rights to those properties being given to the borough where the properties were built.

Recently, the distribution of resources to Councils has changed radically with the implementation of the London Housing Strategy. From 2004 to 2005, a new Regional Housing Board will make recommendations to Ministers on where resources should be allocated for new build, including regeneration initiatives and affordable key worker homes. The London Board has representatives from the Association of London Government (ALG) Government Office for London, Housing Corporation, Greater London Authority (GLA) and English Partnerships, with all representatives being officers – no politicians sit on the board.

The Regional Board will investigate and decide what its overall housing priorities are and this will then have to be approved by ministers. A number of schemes are currently exempt from the new arrangements – for example any schemes for which a borough provides the resources directly rather than via Housing Corporation funding – however these are likely to be a small proportion of new properties constructed. More typically, the Housing Corporation will decide on where development should take place and will be looking at the availability of sites across London and

will liaise with individual boroughs on both suitability of sites and also the appropriate housing associations. This is a major change from the previous arrangement where the Housing Improvement Programme monies were allocated to Councils by the ODPM. Importantly, allocations will be on the basis that the subsequent nominations to these properties are for the whole of the sub-region and not just for the borough. It will be for each sub-region, within certain parameters, to agree how those nominations are to be divided between the boroughs in the sub-region. The borough receiving the allocation has a top slice of funding which is variable across London. West London boroughs (of which Brent is part) have negotiated a 15% top slice, but others vary going up to 25%.

In practical terms, for example, if Ealing is selected as the most appropriate location for new affordable housing then resources will be directed there and the borough will in effect become a net recipient of the homeless. In this case Brent would be redirecting homeless families out of the borough. However, figures currently show that Brent, despite having the highest HNI figure of the 7 west London boroughs, will be a net importer of families over the next three years as there are so many new properties being built in the borough. In response to the new arrangements, Brent Housing Department is currently developing a West London Housing Strategy with its 6 other local authority partners.

The removal of the local discretion over affordable housing and funding allocation decisions inevitably raises issues, and in particular limits the direct influence the Council is able to exert over decisions relating to the location of affordable housing. It is within this context of reduced direct influence that the Task Group considered what options might be available to secure a more advantageous position for the borough. These included:

- lobbying government for more funds – while resources for the provision of affordable housing have increased, housing capital money has been reduced and the Government is prescriptive as to what this should be spent on – for example there are increased amounts for key-worker housing (at the expense of social-rented homes).
- ensuring best practice is adhered to within existing affordable housing compacts, on issues such as management and allocations policies.
- ensuring that for potential new build and regeneration projects, the good practice advice around design, location, master planning, mixed tenure communities and consultation is adhered to.
- where the Council does have influence over new affordable housing development, in particular social-rented, it should use its role as landlord, provider, developer and regulator to ensure that the highest possible standards are met and setting the best example for development.

Appendix 3.

Definitions

Two commonly used measures of housing density are dwellings per hectare and habitable rooms per hectare. *Dwellings per hectare* (adopted in the Government Circular 1/2000, with a minimum density of 30 dwellings per hectare being recommended) is a fairly crude measure, particularly in urban settings and is considered to be really only appropriate for the construction of houses particularly in less urban areas. It also ignores issues of occupancy levels and built form. Hence London planning authorities have tended to use *habitable rooms per hectare* which is better suited to assessing the density of flats and infill development and the intensity of use that can give rise to substantially different impacts. This second measure gives an approximation of the number of people likely to occupy a property although this can vary between housing tenures, with social-rented housing tending to be fully occupied and private housing under occupied. Another factor is whether residents are in full time employment in which case their usage is likely to be less intensive than if they are unemployed, retired or at home with young children although the growth in home working may change this pattern.

A more crudely mechanistic approach has been employed in the London Plan 'Density Location and Parking Matrix', although the importance of 'local character' elsewhere in the Plan permits a flexible application of this approach. Indeed, the importance of maintaining and enhancing local townscape – rather than a dogmatic application of housing densities – is also reflected in the Mayor's study of the particular problems of accommodating new development in London's suburbs (which makes up much of Brent's townscape): *A City of Villages*, 2002.

From the research it is apparent that 'housing density' is an imprecise indicator of residential environmental quality and has limited correlation with residents' perceptions of quality. For example, the 'Quality of London's Residential Environment' survey (LPAC, 1994) found the highest public approval ratings were for pre-1919 terraced housing – a high density form of development which is only exceeded by some of the mid-20th century flatted estates. Yet there are areas of lower density housing which for reasons of poor location, planning, services and management provide a poor environment and are unpopular. It should also be appreciated that London densities are relatively low in comparison to other large European cities, for example Paris, which overall has a much greater population per square kilometre than London but, some consider, affords a superior environmental quality.

Where people are able to exercise choice in where they live they will make trade-offs between different features of their housing, its location and environment as attitudes to the physical characteristics of housing – such as home type and the provision of gardens and car parking – appear more important than density figures per se. Most people find it irrelevant to talk about where they live in terms of housing density levels, rather than the characteristics or experience of their environment. In essence, simple numbers do not accurately reflect the experience of occupiers – it is not simply a matter of housing density, but rather a combination of factors that combine to create life experiences and inform perceptions. Accordingly, whilst it is important to establish what is meant by 'housing density' and how it is measured, this needs to be balanced with more qualitative considerations that reflect the experience of residents and providers of housing. A more holistic view of the issues regarding housing density and, as importantly, its impacts is therefore required if the Council is to make informed decisions regarding current and future policy.

More generally, housing density has proved to be not only a crude planning tool and in some cases – through misapplication and failure to appreciate its inherent conceptual and methodological

limitations – it has actually been counter productive in trying to secure innovative design approaches and providing high quality housing in the required numbers. Therefore the Government and London Plan commitment to increasing housing densities and maximising the provision of new socially inclusive affordable housing in mixed use developments for example, is balanced by local planning authorities being encouraged to refuse badly designed housing proposals. In parallel they have been asked to review their historical planning policies and supplementary planning guidance standards which have traditionally emphasised quantitative rather than qualitative assessment methodologies, particularly in terms of housing density, car parking, block spacing and ‘overlooking’.

Notwithstanding these observations, for the purposes of a report on housing density and its impacts it is important to understand, if not endorse, definitions and measures of housing density. Therefore, whilst there are limitations to quantitative measures of housing density the following table seeks to combine a *numerical* and *descriptive* approach to housing density – using units per hectare as the measure with examples of the nature/form of built environment that differing densities typically produce.

Net density per hectare (No. of houses and flats)	Typical Housing Type
0-20	Leafiest most expensive suburbia; detached houses with large gardens. A small minority of British housing is of this density, but it is common in American suburbs
20-40	Most British housing built for owner occupation in the 20 th century falls into this density band, as does much Council housing. It ranges from smaller and medium sized detached houses through semis and terraces. In the middle lies the 30 homes per hectare standard set in the Tudor Walters report of 1919. The average net residential density of homes built in England in the 1990s was 25 homes per hectare
40-60	Detached housing drops out in this band. Spacious Victorian and Edwardian houses built in terraces and semi detached both council and owner occupied. Some blocks of councils flats also fall into this band, thanks to generous quantities of courts and lawns around them
60-80	Typical inner city residential densities. Includes fairly spacious, high income 3 and 4 storey houses built in the 18 th and 19 th centuries, as well as flats, maisonettes and some modern high density terrace designs, the semi drops out.
80-100	Working class by-law housing of the 19 th century, still abundant in inner cities. No front gardens (front doors open onto pavements) very small back gardens or yards. Denser, large post-war estates of council flats, including tower blocks, in inner city areas.
100 plus	Unusually high densities for Britain today, although private sector apartment block developments (new build and conversions) in city centres are being built in this band. The earliest council housing and housing association mansion blocks, put up around 100 years ago, were built at these densities. The cities of Paris, Barcelona and Copenhagen have densities up to 3 times as high as this.