

Response to the London Mayor's Good Practice Guide on Estate Regeneration

1. Key concerns about estate regeneration are that:

- What is deemed to be estate regeneration is generally not renewal of the homes on council or housing association estates and, despite all the glossy materials produced and aimed at promoting such schemes with tenants, in most instances is simply about demolition. In its wake, it displaces, breaks up and divides communities and ultimately destroys them.
- No respect is paid to tenants and leaseholders whose **homes** are to be demolished and or to have to suffer additional high density homes squashed in closely next to existing homes (to the extent that in some instances they are so close that sunlight is blocked and TVs can be watched from adjacent flats). Estates are places where residents will be raising or have raised their children and grown old and will have also have positively contributed to supporting and sustaining their wider community. Many social housing estates provide very good examples of sustainable communities and Lifetime Neighbourhoods - with not just homes but also gardens, other green and play spaces, active community centres, local shops, pubs and other businesses and sometimes schools or other types of social infrastructure.
- The negative stereotype of social housing tenants (as being lazy scroungers on the state) is explicit in estate redevelopment / demolition proposals and is actively promoted in planning policy such as the London Plan policy 3.9 (Mixed and Balanced Communities). No acknowledgement is made that tenants will have paid (sometimes for decades) for the day-to-day management and maintenance of their not-for-profit homes and the green, play and community infrastructure on their estate (as well as collectively paying off debt accrued in constructing their homes in the first place). Their financial and social commitment is simply shunted aside to satisfy the greed of property developers, investors and for-profit landlords.
- Estate regeneration and insertion of high densification is nothing but a constant take from the least well-off to benefit exclusive and wealthier section of society. It ignores any necessity for duty of care for residents of social housing estates. It leads to transience and a general lack of the essential ingredients of a Lifetime Neighbourhood.
- In most instances demolition and redevelopment is entirely unnecessary, is more expensive, worse for the environment as is social damaging. It

creates high levels of stress, distress and has a detrimental impact on people's health and well-being. Numerous academics and building specialists – such as Anne Power, LSE, the Building Research Establishment and Arup have highlighted these issues and that the only justifiable reason for demolition is where buildings are structurally unsound and this is seldom the case.

- There is always a lack of transparency in estate regeneration schemes – tenants are seldom made aware of plans until negotiations have already occurred and where consultation is little more than a tinkering at the edges of plans already decided.

Social landlords consistently fail to carry out full and detailed analysis of the social, environmental and economic costs of plans let alone consider the benefits (socially, environmentally and economically of refurbishing and genuinely providing renewal of social housing estates). Their eyes are simply on the value of the land that our homes sit on and how much that may bring into their accounts.

- Attempt to grab what is deemed to be *underutilised land*, disrespects the aims of past architects and planners who designed places to improve the health and well-being of residents who were previously squeezed into unhealthy and overcrowded homes.
- At a time when there is no grant funding for new desperately needed social-rented homes it is criminal that the majority of estate regeneration / redevelopment / demolition proposals result in loss of social-rented homes.

2. Comments and concerns about the Mayor's Good Practice Guide to Estate Regeneration

- The foreword of the Mayor's good practice guide starts well in highlighting that particularly in relation to the soaring costs of housing in London, that "we must protect and improve estates owned by councils and housing associations across London". It acknowledges that social housing provides a foundation of our mixed city and that it ensures that Londoners on low incomes have somewhere decent and affordable to live in the capital." The Mayor also says he "wants to see existing local residents closely involved from the outset" and "we need to make sure that tenants and leaseholders on the estate are treated fairly"

The overarching principles set out in Chapter 1 also highlight that “As the primary stakeholders, residents of an estate must be given sufficient opportunity to engage with and shape any proposals that will affect their homes, and they should be proactively supported to do so.

The document as a whole, however is littered with contradictions, exceptions and get out clauses, and lacks detail around how specific processes required to provide the real protection will operate – particularly relating to comments set out in section 1 above. We set out some specific examples below:

- The document as a whole is focused almost entirely on assumed demolition and major redevelopment.
- Chapter 1 paragraph 7 notes that demolishing and rebuilding homes is a time consuming and disruptive process. While it does suggest that the landlord should consider whether there are alternative ways of achieving aims of estate regeneration, it does not set out clearly what would be expected of a landlord or indeed how any challenges might be made around this. Without this it will still leave room for promotion of schemes that have not been properly evidenced (in terms of benefit or dis-benefit) or consulted on, to go ahead. _
- No loss of ‘affordable housing’ Chapter 1 paragraph 9. This section sadly leave a get out clause – which says that demolition should only happen where there is not loss of social housing **‘or where all other options have been exhausted’**. How is this to be determined? In addition, while talking about no loss of social-rented homes the Mayor refers only to existing London Plan policy around no loss affordable housing (which in itself has a huge ‘get out clauses’) and makes no suggestion that new London Plan policy will require that there will be no loss of social-rented homes in any regeneration scheme.
- Monitoring and reviewing – Chapter 1 paragraph 14-16 This section makes no reference to monitoring any existing tenants who may have been displaced from ‘estate regeneration’ schemes which is a serious omission.
- When should consultation start? We have concerns that in some instances local authorities are bypassing the requirement in the 1985 Housing Act to consult with tenants prior to asserting in planning documents that particular housing estates will be demolished. This is currently occurring in Haringey.
- Chapter 2 Who should be consulted We have some concerns about this section, feeling that primary stakeholders should be – tenants and residents of estates and others directly affected who have a common interest with tenants and residents of the estate, as defined by tenants and residents. There are concerns that in some instances there may not

be a common interest and where neighbours would be happy to see social housing estates demolished and social their tenants moved out.

- Nowhere does the document positively propose that good practice should be grass roots bottom-up regeneration (with tenants and residents defining what they feel are the problems on their estate and how these issues may be tackled and what funding might be available, without demolition). There is apparently no room for residents to 'do nothing' or do just some things while holding onto plans that they may wish to be carried out should funding be made available at a later date. Thus, this document is short-term and opportunistic.
- The document fails to highlight that in some instances there seems to be some deliberate running down of certain estates – priming them up for demolition.
- The document fails to set out the principles of fair consultation governed by common law but with a significant decision made in the supreme court in 2014 which suggests that certainly in some circumstances public bodies should consult on alternative options (including those that may have already been discarded by the public body). The Mayor's document (section 23) would appear not to be in conformity with this, in its suggestion that Local authorities and housing associations should not waste their time, or more importantly that of estate residents, by consulting on options which are not viable or deliverable. There are examples of where landlords have dismissed refurbishment schemes on this basis but their assessments, for example around costs of refurbishment, have later been challenged.
- The Mayor's good practice provides caution around having a ballot – which is disrespectful and patronising of social tenants and residents.

3. What needs to be in a good practice guide that would give best protection to precious social-rented homes and the needs of low income households in London.

- Refurbishing and upgrading existing homes should be the first and preferred option rather than demolition. There should be no exceptions to this.
- Full protection should be provided for existing social housing particularly at a time that there is no current available grant funding to deliver new social-rented homes. The 2013 London Wide Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) identified the need for an additional 15,700 social-

rented homes each year in London and yet for years 2005-15 the average annual delivery was only 4,781.

- The Mayor must provide a commitment to lobby government to end the charging of VAT on refurbishment of homes.
- The Mayor must keep a track on resources – particularly in relation to the environmental impact of demolition of perfectly sound social-rented homes.
- Social impact assessments must be carried out on any estate where redevelopment / demolition is proposed.
- Full social audits should be carried out on estates at the start of any discussions around possible estate regeneration.
- Regeneration schemes should ensure that any funding available for estate regeneration should not leak out into developers' pockets. Schemes should be self-financing and any additional resources gained ploughed back into the estate.
- The Mayors should commit to changing London Plan policy such as 3.9 Mixed and Balanced communities that promotes demolition of social-rented homes and negatively portrays social housing tenants.
- The intentions of the planners and architects of social housing estates that provided green and play spaces so that residents could breathe and play and so that Lifelong communities can be created should be respected. Green spaces on housing estates should be protected not considered as redundant land for extracting monetary value. Current plans which consistently over-develop and over-density are comparable to factory farming, which is totally unacceptable.
- The local residents of a social housing estate (not the landlord) should determine who else will be directly affected by any estate regeneration plans and who else would have a common interest with them and should thus also be consulted.
- Support should be provided for estate tenants and residents to determine for themselves what, if any, regeneration is required, with clear and transparent information from their landlords about the funding may be available for any refurbishment options. Tenants and residents are best placed to capture the various components of their existing community and to identify what support might be needed to retain or support a Lifetime Neighbourhood. Tenants and leaseholders do not want to be treated as if they are serfs; they pay their landlord rents and service charges with the expectation of delivery of good services in maintaining their homes. The Mayor's policy documents should strongly support this occurring.

- Should tenants and residents determine that to 'do nothing' at any particularly time may be their best option of retaining structurally sound social-rented homes and of obtaining funding in the future to refurbish their homes, this must be respected.
- The Mayor should require landlords to take seriously their role as stewards of the land that social housing sits on, and the housing too, and ensure that as far as possible they hold both in trust for the benefit of both existing and future social-housing tenants and residents.
- The Mayor should promote positive examples of social housing estates that provide Lifetime Neighbourhoods.
- Support for tenants and residents should include assistance in establishing strong democratic tenants' associations - who may take the lead in holding meetings, carrying out surveys and producing newsletters - with funding available to determine who would be best to support them in this and in more technical matters.

There is an increasing negative view about social housing tenants and their elected associations and a reluctance to support their efforts to engage their estate community. However, alternatives increasingly being used by landlords, which they deem to be more 'innovative' include selected rather than elected steering groups, 'mystery shopping', and support from advisers that are funded directly by the landlord, leading to concerns that 'he who pays the piper calls the tune'. We believe that as a result there is increasing disengagement. This is not best practice.

- There should always be a ballot where demolition is proposed. If this was good enough in relation to stock transfers, surely this must be an essential given the much greater disruption and distress that proposed and unnecessary demolition can cause.
- Any monitoring and reviewing must include tracking of tenants and residents who have been displaced, particularly the impact on their health and well-being.
- The principles of fair consultation must be included.