

SUMMARY AND COMMENTS

DRAFT 2017 LONDON PLAN

HOUSING CHAPTER

Policy H1 - Increasing Housing Supply

Policy H1 on increasing housing supply sets the ten-year targets for housing completions which each local planning authority should plan for. It encourages residential and mixed-use development on windfall sites, brownfield sites, small housing sites, industrial sites and sites with a high Public Transport Accessibility Level (PTAL).

Comments

- These targets are higher than the previous London Plan (from 2011 and last updated in 2016).
- The housing targets include small sites, accommodation for older people, purpose built student accommodation and large-scale purpose-built shared living.

Policy H2 - Small Sites

Policy H2 encourages boroughs to support developments on small site and establishes a presumption in favour of small housing developments.

Comments:

- Unclear where the off-site contributions would be.
- Small sites are included in the overall housing provision targets.

Policy H3 - Monitoring housing targets

Policy H3 explains that for the purpose of monitoring housing targets,

- they should be monitored in net terms
- sites of less than 0.25 hectares should contribute towards achieving the small site targets (see Table 4.2)
- 'non self-contained accommodation and and shared living schemes should count toward meeting housing targets on the basis of a 3:1 ratio, with three bedrooms being counted as a single home'
- 'non self-contained accommodation for older people should count towards meeting housing targets on the basis of a 1:1 ratio, with each bedroom being counted as a single home'.

Comment:

- Small sites, non-self-contained accommodation (student and older persons accommodation) and shared living schemes count towards the overall housing targets.

Policy H4 - Meanwhile use

Policy H4 on meanwhile use

- states that 'Boroughs are encouraged to identify opportunities for the meanwhile use of sites for housing to make efficient use of land while it is awaiting longer-term development.' p. 160
- suggests that meanwhile use as housing 'can be provided in the form of "precision-manufactured homes"' p. 160.

Comment:

- Wary of these “precision-manufactured homes”. The London Assembly Housing Committee is very positive about them (see Nicky Gavron’s report ‘Designed, sealed, delivered: The contribution of offsite manufactured homes to solving London’s housing crisis’ available from: https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/london_assembly_osm_report_0817.pdf).

Policy H5 - Delivering affordable housing

Policy H5 on delivering affordable housing, lists the measures to be taken to achieve the strategic target ‘for 50 per cent of all new homes delivered across London to be affordable’ p. 161. They include the threshold approach, the use of grants, and higher levels of provision expected from affordable housing providers with agreements with the Mayor (at least 50%), from public sector land (at least 50%) and from strategic partners with agreements with the Mayor (at least 60%). It also states that ‘Affordable housing must only be delivered off-site or as cash in lieu contribution in exceptional circumstances.’ p. 161

Comment:

- According to the Glossary of the London Plan, affordable housing is Social Rented, Affordable Rented and Intermediate Housing, like in the Housing Strategy.

Policy H6 - Threshold Approach to Applications

Policy H6 outlines the threshold approach to applications:

- it is applicable to development proposals ‘capable of delivering more than ten units or which have a combined floor space greater than 1000 sqm’ p. 164
- it is set at a minimum of 35%, 50% for public sector land, and 50% for industrial sites
- it has two routes: the Fast Track Route and the Viability Tested Route

To follow the Fast Track Route, applications must

- ‘meet or exceed the relevant threshold level’
- ‘be consistent with the relevant tenure split’ (see Policy H7)
- ‘meet other relevant policy requirements’
- ‘demonstrate that they have taken account of the strategic 50 per cent target [see Policy H5] and have sought grant where required to increase the level of affordable housing beyond 35 per cent’ p. 164

Where an application does not meet these requirements it must follow the Viability Tested Route which requires

- an assessment by the borough (and where relevant the Mayor) of the maximum level of affordable housing as part of the application
- reviews of the result scheme (Early Stage Viability Review, Late Stage Viability Review, Mid Term Reviews)

Note:

Some schemes are not suitable to the Fast Track Route and must follow the Viability Tested Route

- applications which propose affordable housing off-site or a cash in lieu contribution
- schemes that involve the demolition of existing dwellings
- schemes claiming the vacant building credit

Note:

- Student and older persons accommodations and Built to Rent schemes have their own thresholds and criteria for their contribution to affordable housing provision:
 - (a) a Purpose-Built Student Accommodation bedroom is considered affordable when is 'is provided at a rental cost for the academic year equal to or below 55 per cent of the maximum income that a new full-time student studying in London and living away from home could receive from the Government's maintenance loan for living costs for that academic year.' p. 195;
 - (b) the affordable housing requirements from specialist older persons housing are the same as in Policies H5 and H6 but the tenure split requirements may differ from Policy H7;
 - (c) to follow the Fast Track Route of the threshold approach, Build to Rent schemes will need to provide 35% affordable housing (which can be delivered entirely in Discounter Market Rent), 30% of which must be let at London Living Rent levels and 5% at a range of discounts below market rent.
- Small sites are likely to contribute to affordable housing provision through off-site provision or cash in lieu contributions.
- Large-scale non-self contained housing contribute towards the provision of affordable housing through cash in lieu contributions equivalent to 35% of the residential units to be provided at 50% of market rent.

Comments:

- Point 4.6.3 about the need for applicants to 'present affordable housing figures as a percentage of total residential provision in habitable rooms, units and floorspace to enable comparison' p. 166 is noteworthy.
- What are the requirements in terms of affordable housing contribution from development proposals that are not 'capable of delivering more than ten units or which have a combined floor space greater than 1000 sqm' p. 164 ?

Policy H7 - Affordable housing tenure

Policy H7 sets out the mix in housing tenure required by the Mayor for schemes delivering the threshold level of affordable housing to be able to follow the Fast Track Route for viability:

- minimum 30 % of low cost rented homes (Social Rent/London Affordable Rent)
- minimum 30% of intermediate housing products (London Living Rent and London Shared Ownership)
- 40% affordable to be determined by the borough based on identified need.

Comments:

- 40% is a huge discretion for boroughs. Given what we have seen in recent years it is likely that the 40% will end up being intermediate housing products, despite point 4.7.2's presumption that the 40 per cent to be decided by the borough will focus on Social Rent/ London Affordable Rent given the level of need for this type of tenure across London.' p. 160
- Where does the category 'low-cost rent' come from? It is problematic not to differentiate between Social Rent and London Living Rent when assessing needs and establishing targets.
- It would be useful to provide the same assessment (of who can afford which product) as is provided in point 4.7.8 for intermediate housing provision for Social Rent and London Living Rent.
- What does it mean that 'the Mayor's preferred affordable housing tenures are: London Affordable Rent, London Living Rent, London Shared Ownership.' p. 171 (point 4.7.3) ? In particular what does it mean for Social Rent?

Policy H8 - Monitoring of affordable housing

Policy H8 outlines the requirement for boroughs to monitor the delivery of affordable housing, cash in lieu payments and review mechanisms, and to publish their monitoring information.

Policy H9 - Vacant building credit

Policy H9 lists the criteria under which Vacant Building Credit, which reduces the requirement for affordable housing contribution, can be applied. It notes that in most circumstances, its application will not be appropriate in London.

Comment:

- Even though Policy H9 notes that Vacant Building Credit (VBC) will not be appropriate in London in most circumstances, point 4.9.1 states that VBC 'has significant implications for delivery of affordable housing in London where a high proportion of development is on brownfield land where there are existing buildings.' p. 175

Policy H10 - Redevelopment of existing housing and estate regeneration;

Policy H10 details how the losses of existing housing in the redevelopment of existing housing and estate regeneration are to be replaced:

- in general 'loss of existing housing should be acceptable only where the housing is replaced at existing or higher densities with at least the equivalent level of overall floorspace.' p. 175
- in cases of loss of existing affordable housing, it should be 'replaced by equivalent or better quality accommodation', provide 'at least an equivalent level of affordable housing floorspace' and produce 'an uplift in affordable housing provision' p. 175
- in estate regeneration schemes, 'the existing affordable housing floorspace should be replaced on an equivalent basis, i.e. [...] with rents at levels base on that which has been lost' p. 175-6

Comments:

- The Good Practice Guide to Estate Regeneration is yet to be published.
- On point 4.10.2, what does it mean that one of the three aims of estate regeneration is 'maintaining safe and good quality homes' p. 176 ? Is it a reference to Grenfell fire? Grenfell fire should not be used to justify more estate regeneration.

Policy H11 - Ensuring the best use of stock

Policy H11 on ensuring the best use of stock encourages boroughs to make sure stock is occupied and to restrict the use of dwellings as short term holiday rentals.

Comments:

- It would be good to see the evidence on vacant dwellings to know which types of dwellings are empty.
- The policy could go even further by banning secondary homes.

Policy H12 - Housing size mix

Policy H12 on housing size mix states that boroughs should not set prescriptive dwelling size mix requirements for market and intermediate homes, but that they should provide guidance on dwelling size mix for low cost rents to ensure affordable housing meets identified needs. It notes the role of one

and two bed units in freeing up family housing. It also notes that even though one bedroom units help 'reduce the pressure to convert and subdivide existing larger homes', they are the least flexible unit type and that, therefore, schemes consisting mainly of one-bedroom units should be resisted.

Comments:

- It would be good to see the evidence on issues of overcrowding and the impact of welfare reforms.
- It would have been good for the GLA to set targets for unit sizes for each borough in order to deal with the issue of overcrowding, which is a London-wide issue.
- Point 4.12.4 states that one and two bedroom units 'attract those wanting to downsize' p. 179 but does not elaborate on how this process will take place. Will it be managed by boroughs? by housing associations?
- Point 4.12.3 makes clear that family units are 'those consisting of three or more bedrooms' p. 179. How was this established?

Policy H13 - Build to Rent

Policy H13 on Build to Rent outlines the specific affordable housing provision requirements for that sector, put in place 'to recognise [...] the potential role [the Build to Rent sector] can play in accelerating delivery' p. 180.

Comment:

- How can speculation in these types of schemes be avoided?

Policy H14 - Supported and specialised accommodation

Policy H14 encourages the 'delivery, retention and refurbishment' p. 185 of supported and specialised accommodation (which includes move on accommodation, young people accommodation, re-ablement accommodation, accommodation for disabled people, accommodation for people with mental health issues, accommodation for rough sleepers, accommodation for victims of domestic abuse and accommodation for victims of violence against women and girls).

Comment:

- It would be good to see evidence on and assessment of the need for these supported and specialised accommodation.

Policy H15 - Specialist older persons housing

Policy H15 encourages boroughs to 'identify sites which may be suitable for specialist older persons housing' p. 186.

Comments:

- It would be good to see evidence for the assessed needs.
- Research has been done showing that dementia patients have had to stay in hospital because there were no specialised homes for them to go.
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Policy H16 - Gypsy and Traveller accommodation

Policy H16 encourages boroughs to 'meet the identified need for permanent Gypsy and Traveller pitches' p. 190 and provides an improved definition of 'Gypsies and Travellers' as a basis for assessing

need.

Comment:

- Why does this Housing chapter not address the specific needs of BME communities? or of boat dwellers?

Policy H17 - Purpose-built student accommodation

Policy H17 calls on boroughs to ‘ensure that local and strategic need for purpose-built student accommodation is addressed’ p. 193.

Comment:

- Higher education institutions have specified rent levels which are affordable to students. They should be supported in providing more Purpose Built Student Accommodation.

Policy H18 - Large-scale purpose-built shared living

Policy H18 outlines the criteria developments need to meet in order to be considered ‘large-scale purpose-built shared living Sui Generis use developments’ p. 197.

Comment:

- It is unclear which identified need this type of scheme meets.

Comparison with the policy directions and proposals in the section on Housing, Health and Wellbeing in ‘Towards a Community-Led Plan for London’

Caring for Existing Homes

Policy H10 on the redevelopment of existing housing and estate regeneration establishes that replacement of affordable housing should be at least equivalent in floorspace and, in the case of estates regeneration schemes, should be equivalent in rental level. It does not support the maintenance and enhancement of existing homes.

Reference is made to the Mayor’s Good Practice Guide on Estate Regeneration.

Quality of New Homes

Reference is made to the ‘Design’ chapter of this London Plan about the density, quality and sustainability of new homes.

Not-for-Profit Rented Homes

“Affordable”:

- The London Plan continues to use the term “affordable”.

Need assessment:

- This chapter does not make clear (though reference to housing costs and incomes) to what extent

the housing needs of households with less than median income levels will be addressed.

- The 2017 SHMA does not assess the need for not-for-profit rented homes (community-led housing and social rented housing). It assesses the need for low-cost rent, a category which lumps together Social Rent and London Affordable Rent.
- The assessed need for low-cost rent is 30,972 homes per annum (see Table 4.3 p. 171). For comparison, 'Towards a Community-Led Plan for London' calls for 30,000 not-for-profit rented homes per annum.

Overcrowding:

- This chapter does not set targets for reducing overcrowded homes. It provides a general need assessment of unit sizes but leaves it up to boroughs to assess the local needs in terms of unit size.

Public land:

- This chapter sets the threshold level of affordable housing for public sector land to 50%. This means that to follow the Fast Track Route for viability, a development on public sector land needs to provide 50% affordable housing, only 30% of which has to be low cost rented homes. This is far from the requirement of 'Towards a Community-Led Plan for London' to hold public land for not-for-profit rented homes.

Participation in London Wide Housing Policy

Community participation in London-wide housing policy is not addressed in this chapter.

Community-Led Housing Policy

Policy H2 on small sites states that borough should 'support those wishing to bring forward custom, self-build and community-led housing' but does not specify how (i.e. through maintaining a register of available land and providing packages of support).

Private Rented Sector

This chapter does not mention licensing schemes or rent control. It does, in Policy H13 on the Build to Rent sector, set standards of good property management but only for these types of developments.

Conclusion

When compared with the policy directions and proposals in the document 'Towards a Community-Led Plan for London' published by Just Space, it is clear that this Housing chapter is unsatisfactory in its way of addressing the maintenance of existing homes, not-for-profit rented homes and community-led housing; and it is striking that the private rented sector and participation in London-wide housing policy are not addressed in it.

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