

Boosting amenity provision in London

It is our responsibility to put an emphasis on creating new or borrowing and enhancing existing public realm to ensure that London remains an enjoyable and healthy place to live, work and visit says Russ Hamilton

Our population is booming and London is changing as a result, but change is only good if it means more affordable homes and better social and cultural infrastructure to support new development coming forward. The new London Plan addresses this change and looks at how we can densify our city appropriately without compromising the standard of living.

Farrells works across a range of residential and mixed-use developments, from small sites of 20 homes to detailed schemes ranging from 300 – 1,500 homes, as well as masterplan proposals, which allows us to look across all scales of development and see how the provision of amenity space is influenced by the needs and requirements of those who live, work and visit these areas. In London, we can typically categorise the schemes and the amenity required into small, medium and large.

With smaller schemes, the ability to create new public realm and meet the London Plan space requirements, is often limited so we explore opportunities to enhance and 'borrow' what's already there. One example of this is our Gorleston Street scheme for Dolphin Living, which comprises 29 homes in a conservation area overlooking a park. We designed an internal courtyard to enhance access to light and apartment layouts that provide double aspect homes, optimising the views across the park. Our design approach was influenced by the existing amenity, which we used to improve the quality of living for residents and provide a new, attractive frontage for the park.

If you look at mid-scale developments in urban London areas, they rarely have parks that you can borrow and improve for residents and locals, and you must therefore seek alternative opportunities to provide an improved external environment for the existing community as well as internalising amenities for the new residents – this can include internal courtyards and winter gardens



which offer tranquillity. Balancing a scheme's viability with the need to create strong street frontages and ground floor activation for variety, animation, commercial and safety reasons can mean building to the site boundaries, something that will have to be explored with the relevant local authority.

Lyons Place, which we designed on behalf of Almacantar, is a tenure blind development situated between Maida Vale and Little Venice and comprising 76 apartments, penthouses and townhouses. The new scheme replaced a building which sat back from the street edge and was dominated by a vehicle forecourt – offering no real connection for the surrounding community. Our design activated and pushed the new frontages on Edgware Road to the >>>

RIGHT:
One Ruby Triangle Park
©Visualisation

BELOW:
Gorleston



Russ Hamilton is design partner at Farrells



>>> site boundaries whilst still allowing a generous pavement along the busy street. We also created a deep site section providing high-quality amenity for the residents – with a series of lifted courtyards that sit centrally between the two street frontages and are defined by the bigger scale of the 'louder' Edgware Road on one side and the smaller 'quieter' Lyons Place on the other. These courtyards are for use by the residents and are conceived as quiet and calm places, light filled and green, offering an immediate escape from the energy of the Edgware Road, without having to travel to the nearby Regent's Canal or Regent's Park. This 'making' of amenity is positive for the residents, whilst the strong approach to street frontage and complete ground floor activation improves the area's public realm for the quieter back street and the local residents.

RIGHT:
Farrell's RTR Garden

RIGHT BELOW:
RTR Sandgate entrance
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For larger scale schemes which often sit within a wider London or local Borough plan, we are increasingly looking to height to provide the density and new home numbers needed among the amount of green space required to offset development. On such schemes we must activate as much of the ground floor as possible.

Our Ruby Triangle and Carpetright schemes for Avanton and Urban & Provincial are examples of this approach; working with the London Borough of Southwark's Old Kent Road Area Action Plan an attitude to height was established and from this we have been able to provide a major piece of urban green space that will become the lung of the revitalised area. Currently it is closed off to the wider community and has been for some time, however the new design reopens the area to the public and provides multiple entrance and exit points in a bid to start repairing the urban

BELOW:
Gorleston



fabric. Alongside this, each of the new buildings prioritises active frontages, with front doors, community, commercial and retail units all opening up onto the green space to encourage activity at ground floor level, as with mid-scale schemes, this approach offers variety and animation but also security by stopping the large green space becoming a hub of unsocial activity.

As the London Plan seeks to enable our city's planners to further densify London, then it is our responsibility to put an emphasis on creating new or borrowing and enhancing existing public realm to ensure that London remains an enjoyable and healthy place to live, work and visit. ■

