

Norman Foster on the future of cities

The pandemic could accelerate significant change Norman Foster told the first UN Forum of Mayors

First, I would like to congratulate the UN on recognising, through this gathering, the importance of cities, their mayors and civic leaders. Cities are the future of our society – of our civilisation. The words are interchangeable – civic, civilised, cities, citizens. We all know that the world is urban but, in 30 years' time, 2.5 billion more people will live in cities.

Consider the pace of urbanisation before this pandemic, the equivalent of eight cities the size of New York were emerging annually around the world. In two years, 2011-13, China consumed more concrete than America used in the entire 20th century. Why? Because they are generators of wealth, opportunity, liberation and innovation.

But these powerhouses of our future need day-to-day running – leadership, vision and inspiration. And here I pay tribute to you – the Mayors and the teams that you lead – you are where the action is. Over six decades as an architect and urbanist, through my practice and more recently through my foundation – I have engaged directly with many city mayors and regional governors – so I speak from the heart when I talk about the challenges that you face. I have seen first-hand how, with courage and foresight, that power can be used to change cities for the good of

their citizens. I can think back to working with Pasqual Maragall in Barcelona to get rival TV companies to occupy one single communication tower to avoid a mess on the Barcelona skyline. Often, national leaders are just too removed from the front line to get things done.

Another of the many mayors who I have worked with is Mike Bloomberg, who argues that with collaboration cities, business and citizens can succeed in battling the big issue of our time, notably climate change – because governments are simply too slow and sclerotic.

Where do pandemics come in this discourse? Is covid-19 going to change our cities? I suggest that it might seem so now, but in the wider arc of history, the answer is no.

Instead of change, it has merely hastened, accelerated, trends of change that were already apparent before the pandemic. The only constant is change and cities are forever evolving, learning from each other across continents. Changed by the technologies of their times and by leaders who have the vision to embrace them.

Take London as an example. The Great Fire, 1666, created building codes that led to fireproof brick construction. The cholera epidemic, of the mid-19th century, cleaned up the Thames from an open sewer and was the birth of modern sanitation. In its wake came the healthy dimension of public parks. Then tuberculosis struck and helped the birth of the modern movement in architecture – big windows, sunlight, terraces, white and clean. But every one of those consequences – fireproof construction, sewers, green parks, modernism – would have happened anyway and not just in London but in cities around the world, because cities learn from each other – each crisis hastened and magnified the inevitable.

Is covid-19 going to change our cities? I suggest that it might seem so now, but in the wider arc of history, the answer is no.

It has been said: if you want to look far ahead, then first look far back. History tells us that the future is not two metre distancing. The last major pandemic 1918-20, claimed more lives and young ones, created deserted city centres, face masks, lockdowns and quarantines. Sounds familiar? It also her-

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alded the social and cultural revolution of the 1920s, with big public gathering spaces, department stores, cinemas and stadia.

What, after this pandemic, will the equivalents be for our coming age? What defines us? It's mobility. Mobility of people, goods and information at a time of climate change and decarbonisation. Look at some trends of change in mobility. Some with us – some on the way. Many are being implemented by the mayors here today:

- Clean electric vehicles – away from fossil driven.
 - Induction charging on the move.
 - Driverless, densely packed, nose-to-tail.
 - Young people less interested in ownership.
 - Their embrace of ride sharing and on-demand services like Uber.
 - Rise of e-bikes and scooters.
 - Prospect of drone technology to move goods and people.
 - Much less space needed for vehicles.
 - Car parks could be obsolete.
 - Monorails could have a new future
- Look at some trends of change in the patterns of working:
- More working from home or a third place, which could be an electronic Starbucks in the high street or a retreat in the high Alps.
 - A greater appreciation of the benefits and need for face-to-face contact in the traditional workplace, but with a far greater emphasis on social spaces and healthy environmental systems.
 - More flexible hours and less travel.

We now have scientific evidence to prove that green buildings with natural ventilation are not only good for your health, but they enable you to perform better. These kinds of buildings are now the exception. But they could become mainstream.

We also have proof that green spaces in cities –



Forum of Mayors 2020

The UN Forum of Mayors will bring together city leaders from Europe, North America, Central Asia and the Caucasus to address the key challenges of our time. Under this year's theme "City action for a resilient future", mayors will have their hands full discussing critical questions: What will our urban life look like after the global pandemic? How can cities spur ambitious climate action? How can we become more sustainable while leaving no one behind?

however big or small – contribute to health and well-being. I have worked with civic leaders over several decades in the German Duisburg to bring green and progression to what could have been a rust belt.

Finally, some trends on industry and culture:

- Globalisation has lifted billions out of poverty but created local rust belt communities of despair. So, a better balance of local and global is on the way and each city could play a part.
- Industry is no longer about smokestacks. Urban manufacturing is clean, creates jobs and can reinvigorate the economy.
- Encouraging culture in spaces for the arts is another economic lifeline.
- Urban farming once a reality in cities past, could enjoy a renaissance in the future – hydroponics uses a fraction of precious water, make for greater yields to deliver fresher, cheaper, more flavourful food on the city's doorstep. Imagine an urban version of the farmers' market. An obsolete multi-storey car park makes the ideal urban farm.

The cumulative effect of just some of these many trends are transforming city centres and local neighbourhoods, making them quieter, cleaner, safer, healthier, more friendly, walkable, bikeable and, if the opportunity is grasped, to be greener.

As less space is needed for transport, we could see increased paved public space, avenues of trees, mini parks, new terraces using radiant technology to be cooler in summer, warmer in winter. Trees beautify as well as absorbing Co2 to improve the air quality.

This is what I mean when I say that covid-19 has accelerated more sustainable and equitable trends. Many of you at this event have embraced change with enthusiasm and, through leadership, have brought your citizens with you – setting new standards for all.

What is new? Attitudes – a public attitude of mind that is more open to change than ever before.

Neighbourhoods have seen a resurgence in appeal with the tag of the "15-minute city" – where living, working, dining, learning, being entertained and entertaining can all happen within walking distance. This is not new, but it has been boosted by the



pandemic, and by design could be improved.

Some dense communities have not seen higher infection rates than the suburbs. The problem is dense cramped households, which could be within cities or suburbs alike – already an issue before the pandemic. Affordable housing remains a challenge and is linked to the homeless issue.

Some of these trends are not new. I led the changes that transformed Trafalgar Square, in the heart of London, and rescued the Port of Marseilles from traffic, to bring it back to a neighbourhood. I witnessed in America Boston's big dig, in Europe Madrid's Rio Project and in Asia Seoul's city centre – all have created vast new green parks out of highways from the past.

So, what is new? Attitudes – a public attitude of mind that is more open to change than ever before and with that a new range of opportunities to improve the quality of life for urban citizens as well as helping to combat climate change.

Buildings and transportation, between them, account for 42 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions.

So the dense, compact pedestrian-friendly European city is a model of sustainability and sociability, compared with the sprawling car borne gas guzzling metropolis. Now is the time to make it even more compact and liveable. City planning should not be two-dimensional paperwork – the reality is in three dimensions and should be modelled accordingly.

Public spaces are outdoor rooms. Culture, clean industry, leisure, commerce, shopping and housing can all co-exist side by side but that needs changing attitudes to zoning. On the question of housing, if the market is unable to address issues of equality with the right kind of affordable accommodation then, as in the past, that could be a civic initiative. When I was a young student, some of the most outstanding public housing was commissioned by city authorities.

In the move to making cities self-sustaining, barriers between different interest groups and professions need to be relaxed in a holistic approach. An obvious example is when those concerned with waste work with the energy sector to convert waste to energy – but there are many other examples of such synergies.

The pandemic is a tragic event for so many. We have all lost loved ones and for the moment the virus continues. But, stepping back, I am confident that cities will prove their resilience and appeal – they will bounce back stronger and better as a consequence. We are all of us grateful for the untiring efforts and leadership that you, the mayors and civic leaders are achieving in these difficult times and looking beyond into a bright future. ■

IMAGES:

Foster ideas for greening our streets, a before [LEFT] and after [ABOVE] study by their urban design team. Norman Foster photo credit: Frederic Aranda



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Using design for real planning

The White Paper's proposed areas of Growth, Renewal and Protection will need to use 'design by research' and propositional planning, not just development management, to work well argues Lee Mallett

The chief proposition in the White Paper, Planning for the Future, is that development should be permitted in areas of Growth, Renewal (or Growth and Renewal) and carefully proscribed in protected areas. Local plans should also take 30 months to resolve, not decades.

Both the Bishop and Farrell reviews (of 2011 and 2014) advocated a revival of propositional planning, not a return to the 'Utopian' planning of the post-war period, but the use of Britain's wealth of design skills to anticipate and accommodate needs brought about by change.

The fundamental proposition of the 1947 Act was that planning should mediate fairly and democratically how we plan for the future. To deliver on that promise, which remains socially valid, our system needs to 'get in front of' what we need. Not to react late or to preserve vested interests. We now also accept the imperative to be ecologically, socially and economically sustainable.

The White Paper's propositions are rooted in the belief planning has become a prophylactic, when we need it to enable. Sir Terry Farrell's propositions over the decades have showed how we might use propositional design and planning to create development frameworks. These can be codified to modulate detailed responses.

Shortly after the Bishop and Farrell reviews I interviewed key figures for an MA thesis. They provided some fuel for conclusions on how we might restore propositional planning as a key tool in a more intelligent and liberal planning system that didn't focus so much on development management.

National policy

The NPPF explicitly supports the idea that design is valued, and the White Paper concurs: 'there is not enough focus on design'. There are no legislative excuses for the planning system to avoid using design as a tool to discover potential, whether in partnership with the private sector or unilaterally.

But what the NPPF does not do, nor the White Paper (and nor did the Bishop and Farrell reviews) is spell out how local authorities might do it, or how

the Government might use design to plan. This seems odd when you consider how much design is clearly valued in other areas of our lives - personified perhaps in the late Sir Terence Conran.

New local plans may have to be produced in 30 months. Local development frameworks and high-level design codes will be needed, or those plans will be hollow promises riddled with planning risk.

Netherlands v. England

Around the same time as the Bishop and Farrell reviews, five Dutch ministries jointly published a joint Action Agenda (imagine that) for Architecture and Spatial Design which set out the specific efforts that central government would make to ensure these core skills 'contribute excellently and effectively to spatial and cultural development and strengthen our international economic position'.

It set out a series of key urban design tasks, using 'design by research' and shifted the emphasis of national policy to 'transform existing cities and landscapes. The new tasks in building and in areas are infill development, embedding, renovation, reallocation and redevelopment.

'From building to city, and from road to landscape, the emphasis will be on transforming urban space already utilised.' This generated a new emphasis for policy at the heart of government that recognised the role of design in achieving it.

'The White Paper's proposals for a focus on Growth, Renewal and Protection will require a similar trans-governmental focus with local propositional research by design, to discover more precisely what that might mean for each area. It needs spelling out.

Design by research

Planners, in partnership with architects, developers, communities and stakeholders, will need to explore ideas to create development frameworks and design codes for areas of Growth, Renewal and Protection. Planners can co-ordinate and contribute to 'light touch' design to research spatial and physical problems and suggest opportunities quickly and inexpensively without turning it into official policy-speak.



Lee Mallett is an urban regeneration consultant and joint publishing editor of Planning in London

More resources

Planning will need more resources to pursue this shift in focus. The White Paper refers to application fees being increased or diverted. Perhaps extra investment could come from new national Infrastructure Levy receipts. No use having that money without having figured out where it's going to go.

Higher status

Planning's low status is a problem. David Cameron's reductive comment that planners are 'the enemy of enterprise' remains misguided. Planners need to take back a higher profile in local and national debate, not take a back seat behind politicians. Finn Williams at Public Practice has been doing a good job. A bigger, louder push is required.

The greatest enabler

There are plenty of examples of how design has been used as a research tool. Our system remains the best mechanism we have for managing competing interests. That's why we invented it and why we need it, now especially, to do what it is supposed to do, to improve society and our response to climate change.

It might be a way of reinvigorating democracy. And far from being an 'enemy of enterprise', it could be its greatest enabler. If the White Paper's ideas are to translate into a better system, the Act that follows must restore and resource propositional planning as the heart of what Planners do, and what Planning does. ■

Shield or sword?

Nicholas Boys Smith welcomes the government's white paper on planning reform which asks profound questions about what our planning system is for

In the Building Better Building Beautiful Commission's final report, my co-chair, the late Sir Roger Scruton, wrote that "beauty must become the natural result of working within our planning system" not "a cost, to be negotiated away once planning permission has been obtained." We need, he argued, to turn our planning system round, "from its existing role as a shield against the worst, to its future role as a champion of the best."

Does the Government's planning white paper start to achieve this? I think it does. It's certainly ambitious. That brings risk ("very courageous Minister") but it's getting three big things right.

Firstly, it accepts that the popular beauty and livability of the new settlements that we create matters. It matters for the public acceptance of their creation and for the lives that our children and children's children will lead in them. There's a growing corpus of evidence that many of the components that make places beautiful (such as walkable streets, 'gentle density' and street trees) also make them healthy, happy and sustainable. Far too few new places achieve this, less than a quarter in one recent study. That must change with more visual local plans setting popular 'pattern books' for what's acceptable.

Secondly, the white paper is right that we need to create a more predictable level playing field. There is a smoking gun if you want to understand why we don't build enough homes in England. It's that our system operates on a uniquely discretionary case-by-case basis. This creates greater uncertainty which has increased planning risk, pushed up the price of permissioned land and acted as a rising barrier to entry. It's no coincidence that the proportion of homes delivered by small builders market is declining (12% and falling); that only 10% of our homes are self-built versus a 50% European average; or that modular construction is struggling to gain a foothold.

Finally, the white paper is right that we need to 'bring the democracy forward' and re-invent the ambition, depth and breadth with which councils engage publicly in the creation of local plans. Creating shorter, more powerful and more visual local plans will help but councils will also need to reinvent their use of digi-

tal technology.

It does not stop there. I have huge sympathy with public sector planners. The vast majority, certainly of those I have met and worked with, are well-meaning, hard-working and under-paid. This white paper could be good for them too as well as for the quantity and quality of the places we create. One very experienced London official said to me last year:

'I was brainwashed into the world of thinking that development control is planning but it isn't. The plan-making exercise has been marginalised.'

A process which has clearer, more map-based and more visual local plans and better digital engagement would free up planners better to support the public and not just be development control officers on a depressing and needless treadmill treating ever planning application as if it was bespoke. This would be good.

Implemented well, these proposals should help to move planning from a culture of fear to a culture of

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affirmation. We are heirs to beautiful towns, set in incomparable countryside. Our goal should be to pass that heritage to our successors, not depleted but enhanced. Quantity matters. But so does quality.

Some predictable voices came out immediately criticising the report in blood-curdling terms. Most appear not to have read it before they spoke, not to understand the politics or economics of development

Nicholas Boys Smith is the director of Create Streets and was co-chair of the Building Better Building Beautiful Commission alongside the late Sir Roger Scruton



or to be so wedded to the 1940s approach that they refuse to countenance change even when it is palpably and desperately needed. (To be fair, there are also some good questions emerging as well – above all on the inescapable tension between meeting housing demand and 'levelling up.')

But the 'end of the world' style critics (some of whom are not just shouty journalists but working for organisations that claim to care about planning and design) need to be able to answer these questions:

- What is so different about how we live in England to most of the rest of the world that means we cannot plan strategically but have to focus on every decision case-by case?
- Why do they think that the UK housing market is so concentrated? Might it possibly have anything to do with the near unique way we run our chaotic planning system?
- Why do they think there are so few self-builders in the UK?
- The UK is a pretty entrepreneurial place: why is modular build struggling to take off?
- Why should we not move to public engagement that is profoundly more digitally enabled?

If they don't have convincing answers to these questions which don't involve the high-risk nature of our planning system (and I have not seen any) then I would politely urge them to roll their sleeves up and help fill in the detail rather than just shouting 'fire' from the smokeless rooftops.

There are risks. But there's also every reason to hope that a revitalised planning system would help us again aspire, with Clough Williams-Ellis, for a 'happy awareness of beauty' to be 'the everyday condition of us all.' ■

<https://www.createstreets.com/create-communities/>

Flexible legislation designed for a more flexible world

Local doesn't necessarily mean better so it is important that people can enjoy places where they feel identified, safe, and accepted says Federica Buricco

The Government's new legislation regarding flexibility for the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order has come as welcome news to the urban design community. The way we live, shop and work has changed significantly, a fact that has been drastically accelerated by Covid-19 in the past few months, and it is reassuring to see planning policy now catching up. It is a landmark move, which I hope will also form the catalyst for change across Europe.

This is not an entirely new concept though. As custodians of the built environment, for decades we have sought to achieve "architectural flexibility" - the ability to adapt the space, layout, and even the structure of a building to meet evolving needs. Now we have the legislative green light to do so.

High streets in the 17th and 18th centuries were hubs of mixed-use activity that kept them vibrant, yet over the years they have become stale and rigid for a multitude of reasons, whether that is inflexible planning, occupation by massive retailers and large chain stores, or a move away from the high street to shopping centres and online, the combination of which has led to demise of our high street. So how do we make it work?

Design changes for the future

In the same way that we are seeing more mixtures and nuances in the way we live, work and express ourselves, I hope this overhaul will mean that the days of inflexible, rigid zoning and single-use buildings are over. All future buildings will need to be designed with flexibility in mind and with the view that they could adapt from lease to lease and accommodate a more expansive range of uses.

As a result we can expect modular construction to continue growing in popularity owing to its speed and adaptability, likewise the design of easily dividable spaces with moveable partition walls and multipurpose furniture that allow spaces to flourish under various guises will be key.

Goodbye to the long lease

While we can make design changes to ensure our buildings are future-proofed and flexible in line with the new planning guidance, for lasting

change to happen we need to see landlords and asset managers also embrace this new way of thinking. The days of locking in an anchor tenant for eight-10 years are over, today flexibility and agility must come first – think rotating pop ups, cultural and experiential retail that creates memorable experiences for consumers. Camden Market in north London is a prime example of this, with its pop up culture and varied calendar that blends retail with performance, food and beverage, labs, makers' studios and co-working spaces, retains its appeal with an ever-evolving offer that provides enduring value to both operators and visitors.

Collaboration will be key here; landlords who have historically focused on their own assets and portfolios would do better to form co-operatives

While this new found flexibility is welcome, it is perfectly possible to have too much of a good thing. In the bid to mix it up and survive, we risk oversupply of any one offering

and work together to bring footfall, vibrancy and profits back to our high streets. Ultimately, they are championing the same cause and carving a new path of less resistance for retail.

Everything in moderation

While this new found flexibility is welcome, it is perfectly possible to have too much of a good thing. In the bid to mix it up and survive, we risk oversupply of any one offering; five trendy new gyms appearing in place of failed retail isn't going to achieve the balance we need. We need shops, co-working spaces, gyms, cafes and more to bring the balance back and we must embrace the concept of multi-use spaces – a crèche in the morning, yoga studio during the day and auditorium at night, for example.



Federica Buricco is an Associate at CallisonRTKL

Museums, libraries and galleries are a modern day illustration of how this multi-use flexibility can foster prosperity; the rise of in-house coffee shops, cinemas, pop-up markets, community classes and evening events has helped ensure their future and capture a broader audience. Our high streets must now follow suite. Conversion of redundant space to residential, although not covered under this specific legislation, will also help add to the mix as long as it is done in a measured way where quality assurances can be made.

The rise of localism

The Covid-19 pandemic forced us to reevaluate the way we live our lives and has shone a light on localism. We are already seeing employers of all sizes making commitments to more flexible ways of working with less time required in the office. We have less of a want or need to make extended travel into central London and we have seen the 'go local' community ethos really gather momentum, meaning that local high streets are primed for a comeback. In fact, for many of the neighbourhood grocers, butchers, delicatessens and similar the last few months have been some of their most profitable, with people favouring the independents and boutique operators over the mass chains and crowds.

It is clear that if local doesn't necessarily mean better, it is important that people can enjoy places where they feel identified, safe, and accepted. With legislation in place to further encourage and support this, plus a renewed consumer appetite for change, the future is looking brighter. We mustn't rest on our laurels now though, with the success of this new legislation now dependent on a concerted effort from the entire stakeholder map, whether local authorities, urban designers, landlords, asset managers or occupiers. ■

Beauty, privacy and cupboards What do the people really want?

Ben Derbyshire asks how we should approach a nationwide design code

It is now received wisdom that resistance to new housing development would be greatly reduced if only local objectors could be convinced of the quality of homes to be constructed in their neighbourhoods. The Prince of Wales sums this up in his foreword to the Prince's Foundation publication *Housing Communities: What People Want*". He says:

"Local communities must be involved at the earliest stage, and as the key partners. If this happens there is a chance that we might see rather less campaigning against the things people don't want and rather more pro-active campaigning for the things they do want."

Much the same sentiment has found its way into the government-sponsored *Living with Beauty* report, widely endorsed by the secretary of state, Robert Jenrick, which asserts investment is needed into the values it avers matter most to people – beauty, community, history, landscape.

As a consequence, the highly respected practice, Urbed (Urbanism, Environment and Design), has been appointed by MHCLG to come up with a national model urban design code, capable of delivering these outcomes. I understand Urbed's draft proposal will be put out for consultation this autumn.

It's really important that these proposals are not subverted by a political sensibility with its roots in a conservative predilection for all things "traditional" and lest the stylistic preferences of the traditionalists impose a presumption in favour of Widow Twankey aesthetics on what should otherwise be a very worthwhile formula for finding out what local people really want in their neighbourhoods.

I am sure I am not alone in harbouring a suspicion that the "evidenced-based" proposition put forward by some lobbyists has more than a hint of tendentious historicism in the case made for traditional aesthetics as the key to popular development. But happily this is not a new topic. And there is plenty of evidence to be found from recent research that shows that a traditional aesthetic isn't the primary factor in garnering local support.

As president of the RIBA and chair of HTA Design (designers and placemakers in the built environment), I have often described the quest for quality in the built environment as the pursuit of planning and

design that gives rise to human wellbeing and a positive relationship with the natural world.

Three studies confirm that the lay public have a wide view of what outcomes they are seeking from the development of new homes and neighbourhoods – and beauty is just one of these. So in seeking support the design code formula must obviously spread its enquiry wider than just considering what local people want development to look like.

A Cabe study, *What Home Buyers Want* (2005), found that the first concern is the quality of an area, notably in terms of access to facilities and services, a sense of community, safety and security. Space, both inside and outside the home, ease of access and privacy are important criteria, as is convenience of parking. All these issues are addressed in the report before it gets to external appearance where Cabe concluded

Traditional architecture or 'houses that look like houses' came sixth and last in the ranking of spontaneous likes...the first concern is the quality of an area, notably in terms of access to facilities and services, a sense of community, safety and security

that the key to acceptability appears to be not the style but rather the richness of the architecture, so that a modern architecture that is not minimalist and is rich in detail is regarded as equally desirable. The authors also note that presence of high-quality landscaping increases aesthetic approval.

Research carried out for the RIBA's Future Homes Commission (2012) concluded that good-sized rooms, storage, natural light, privacy and sound insulation and the flexibility to accommodate future needs and family members are the most important criteria for judging the quality of a home. High levels of natural light stands out as a consideration with 63

Ben Derbyshire is immediate past president of the RIBA and chairman of HTA Design



per cent of respondents regarding this as of the highest importance. After that, space in rooms and corridors (51 per cent), privacy and freedom from noise outside (49 per cent), outside space (47 per cent). Neighbourhood design follows at 43 per cent, alongside privacy and noise insulation inside the home and security. Adequate storage scores 42 per cent.

The Prince's Foundation report of 2014, mentioned earlier, is based on findings from 26 "enquiry by design" projects in which local residents are engaged in the design of new development or regeneration projects in the course of which their preferences are expressed in consultation workshops and interviews. "Traditional architecture" or "houses that look like houses" came sixth and last in the ranking of spontaneous likes expressed in workshops, behind green space, a revitalised local economy, sense of place and character, integration with context and a village-like feel. The report's summary cites traditional architecture based on local precedent and retention of local identity as key principles for new developments, but it is important to recognise that these criteria rank among 13 other recommendations.

I would be the last to argue that the external appearance of development is unimportant. But it is crucial that the national design code recognises a critical observation of the Cabe study that, "Consumers are smart – it is not a question of 'educating' them but of ensuring that the potential benefits (of development) are in fact realised".

These reports make it abundantly clear that there are many aspects of housing development that make it attractive to people. If the object of the exercise is to encourage the conversion of NIMBYS to YIMBYS on the basis of an understanding that adjacent development is of a quality that will meet local aspirations, there is more to it than what it looks like. ■

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London is closed

Currently, the experience of travelling in what is supposed to be a 'world city' is evidence that it is anything but says Paul Finch

I voted for Sadiq Khan, both as my former constituency MP, and when he stood as a candidate to be Mayor of London. So what follows is not generic criticism from a political critic, but a plea from a Londoner who would like the mayor to ensure that this great capital remains just that.

Currently, the experience of travelling in what is supposed to be a 'world city' is evidence that it is anything but: instead a messy amalgam of failed ideas, operational incompetence and political indifference.

Last month, in what was a symbolic moment, Tower Bridge became stuck, having opened to allow a 'tall ship' through but then jamming. The police, invariably absent when traffic problems occur in the capital, on this occasion eventually arrived on the scene, providing useless advice to road users that they should 'seek alternative routes'.

To Londoners such as myself, especially those who dare to live south of the Thames, this advice was par for the course in being useless. The moment you drive west of Tower Bridge you incur a £15 road tax penalty (sorry, 'congestion charge'). If you reverse your journey, you negotiate the night-

mare of crossing the river via the Rotherhithe Tunnel, hopefully not when the police are conducting one of their helpful traffic checks on the other side, thereby extending the crossing time by 15 minutes (as happened to me that day).

If you just keep going, bear in mind that the £15 penalty now operates at the weekends, as Mayor Khan's contribution to making life easier during the pandemic. To cross the river is no simple matter. You cannot turn left from the Embankment on to Westminster Bridge. Vauxhall Bridge is closed to most traffic because of road works. You cannot turn left onto Chelsea Bridge. Wandsworth bridge is half-closed for road works Hammersmith Bridge is closed (as usual) for 'strengthening'.

Almost needless to say, there are no extant plans for replacement/relief bridges in central London, though there are terribly exciting plans to illuminate those that exist – a good example of decadent design trumping good old engineering principles which explain why we have bridges and tunnels in the first place. Bring back Brunel, you might say. At the time of writing, it had just been confirmed that any plan for a relief Hammersmith

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bridge has been scrapped – one day after traffic was made crazy by the closure of the Rotherhithe tunnel on a Sunday, generating predictable chaos around Tower Bridge.

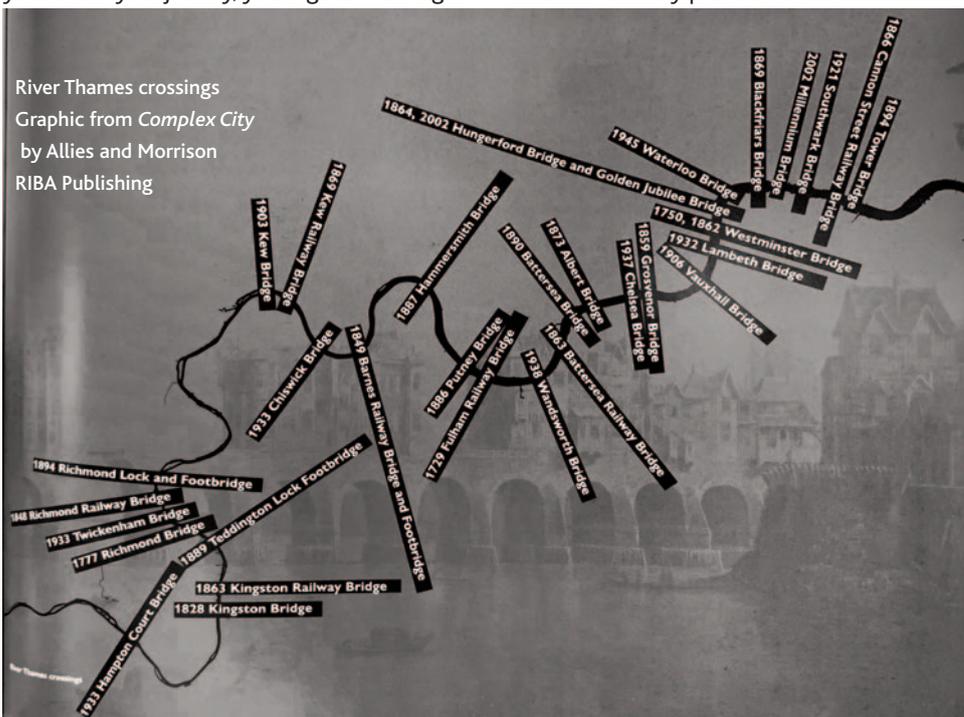
London has lost the habit of bridge-building. The last new crossing, the Millennium Bridge, was a private initiative and contributed nothing to relieving traffic congestion. It is hard to think of a new London bridge carrying vehicles, built in the 20th century and still operative. Public policy appears to be that bridges are bad – unless they are for pedestrians and cyclists. But if you hate the idea of bridges for cars, it is a short step to hating any bridge: hence the abandonment of the Rotherhithe Park to Canary Wharf idea, and further west the proposal to link Vauxhall and Pimlico. It goes without saying that there is no extant proposal (see above) to build a relief crossing, despite the repeat closures of Hammersmith Bridge, which again unduly penalise Londoners living south of the Thames.

Mayor Khan hails from Tooting, so must be well aware of the grotesque inequity of London Underground provision for people like him and me, with only about 10 per cent of stations south of the river. We need bridges and we need transport policies that work for all, not just the lucky transportine majority.

The mayor claims that he wants London to get back to work, yet he has done little or nothing to encourage this to happen. On the contrary, the message is that not only should we be wary of using public transport, but that we should avoid the £15 penalty charge for travelling about in our own city by other means, weekends included

Message: London is closed. ■

First published in AJ with kind consent



River Thames crossings
Graphic from *Complex City*
by Allies and Morrison
RIBA Publishing

The Covid challenge for property management

Carl Whyman thinks about maintaining occupier relationships in a COVID-19 world

March 2020 was a turning point for all of us. We went from getting on with our lives, believing that COVID-19 was something that had nothing to do with us in the UK, to suddenly being in the midst of a worldwide pandemic that dominates almost every conversation and interaction. The challenges across our portfolio were varied and at times exceptional, but one key factor has always been the relationships that we have maintained with our occupiers and communication.

We have all found out a lot about ourselves, but as property managers, it is the basics that have proved the most important part of our work. Going further for our occupiers, looking to be solutions-orientated when challenged and being tenacious to secure the best results for all involved are claims that sound clichéd, but are nevertheless true.

When operating across a large UK wide portfolio that includes mixed-used residential, commercial and retail units, needs vary, and it is our job to understand

A residential estate suddenly fully occupied seven days a week by a diverse cross section of city professionals, families, key workers, vulnerable and elderly residents needs to provide more than ever a sense of community and safety. Communication is vital

them and help facilitate the right services. A residential estate suddenly fully occupied seven days a week by a diverse cross section of city professionals, families, key workers, vulnerable and elderly residents needs to provide more than ever a sense of community and safety. Communication is vital. This could be as simple as setting up a WhatsApp group or organising for a vulnerable person to have shopping brought to their door. Often small and random acts of kindness, thoughtfulness and help are really appreciated. These things may not be in the typical job description for the typical block manager, but these are unusual times, to say the

least. Stepping up and filling the void is the right thing to do. As we heard from Government, we are all in this together and we are in a unique and privileged position as managing agents to step up to the plate and we are pleased to do so.

In a commercial office block, needs are very difficult. This is not just about rent collection. Yes, both quarter one and quarter two rent days have been challenging, but crucially not impossible. We have sought to better understand our occupiers: what is their business? How is COVID-19 affecting them, both as individuals and as businesses? Understanding their needs and circumstances is crucial. If a tenant's team can only operate in their place of work, we need to find safe ways of getting them back and operational as soon as it is practical and legally permitted. On the other hand, if they are operating remotely, what can we do to ensure that they don't have to worry about their office and that everything will be functional and secure for when they return?

Regular dialogue with each tenant increases the chance that you will be able to work collaboratively and constructively through difficult times. This has been especially true through COVID-19 and we have been able to fully utilise these good relationships for the benefit of our clients. No matter who the tenant is, a mutually acceptable arrangement ought to be capable of being found if there exists a history of dialogue. Where the dialogue is missing, misuse and misunderstanding can develop and it is more likely that both landlord and tenant will become entrenched in their positions.

Another key area of focus over the last few months has been ensuring everyone's safety covering not just tenants but also on-site staff, all our supply chain partners and of course our own staff. It should go without saying that treating health and safety as some type of tick box exercise is never appropriate or acceptable – particularly today. In some settings, we are seeing those in charge putting up a few signs and clearly hoping for the best. This approach will not cut it and an intentional and robust plan is the order of the day. Also, including occupiers in the reopening process means that it is more likely that the facility will be used and changes will be embraced, as safety remains at the forefront.



Carl Whyman is Chief Executive at Lee Baron

When we looked to reopen one of our large central London estates, we did not simply affix signs to the doors instructing people to social distance and sanitise. We ran a comprehensive consultation to understand what the needs of workers in the building were and produced a bespoke booklet that was designed to inform and reassure all parties that we have their safety and best interests at heart.

The next few months will continue to be very challenging with winter approaching and local lockdowns becoming more common. Now is not the time to forget the basics; it has been our relationships and our desire to go further for our clients that has got us through this far and it will be these things that get us through the next stage. ■

When we looked to reopen one of our large central London estates, we did not simply affix signs to the doors ... we ran a comprehensive consultation to understand what the needs of workers in the building were and produced a bespoke booklet that was designed to inform and reassure all parties that we have their safety and best interests at heart

Operating throughout the UK, we are leaders in all aspects of property management across all sectors. We specialise in retail, mixed-use residential and are renowned for managing large complex estates. Our offering includes advisory and consultancy services, compliance and risk management and property, financial and data management.

For more information: <https://www.leebaron.com/together>

De-risking the capital's waste collection in times of a crisis

A pandemic or climate change could negatively impact entire communities in a very short space of time explain Jonas Törnblom and Tony Yates

Urban waste management is a critical function. When it breaks down, the consequences are wide reaching and its impact is felt across all parts of society.

Why, then, is the majority of the world's waste management infrastructure built upon systems that are rarely assessed in the context of a global pandemic? Why are most of the world's cities' waste collection solutions – London included – unable to even withstand severe weather conditions?

In light of Covid-19, we should now assess how effective London's waste management solutions are, not only in the context of a global pandemic, but also other disruptive events caused by climate change.

Different collection systems exhibit different advantages and disadvantages. Some may be more expensive than others, whilst some are more user and environmentally friendly. System resilience and robustness in the face of a severe crisis are, however, rarely prioritised when selecting an appropriate handling concept for cities, new developments and regeneration sites.

The three contenders: bin collection, underground containers and pneumatic waste transportation systems

Covid-19 has left few parts of society unaffected and its fallout continues to unfold. Yet, we have been here before. Previous pandemic episodes, which include the Black Death of the 14th century, two cholera pandemics of the 19th century and even the SARS outbreak in 2002, have a number of things in common.

Firstly, they collectively killed millions of people. Secondly, they proliferated through waste such as contaminated food and water, and through vermin.

Reducing the infection potential of waste in a thriving capital

Surely now, in the 21st century, and whilst we are still in the eye of the Covid-19 storm, it is time to explore what a resilient waste management infrastructure looks like and consider what could be

done to reduce the risk factors associated with waste handling, particularly in densely populated areas such as London.

If infectious diseases can be spread through waste material and animals, then implementing solutions that minimise – if not eradicate – physical handling of waste are essential.

As we begin an era of social distancing, it goes without saying that bin storage rooms and waste processing facilities, both of which carry risk of transmission, must be effectively managed. And, as

Whilst you can address London's growing population by building upwards, you cannot simply keep adding more bins to streets already crowded with them; not only in the context of a pandemic, but also aesthetically

more is known about the substantially higher risk of infection within indoor environments, outdoor disposal facilities are likely to come into the spotlight.

Designing in operational resilience

The majority of London's waste is still manually collected in bins or bags that line the streets, are often overfull and are therefore vulnerable to littering and vermin.

However, considering that some parts of London are developing 400 homes per hectare, the question of where will all the bins required to collect the waste of all the residents inhabiting these homes go quickly comes into focus. Whilst you can address London's growing population by building upwards, you cannot simply keep adding more bins to streets already crowded with them; not only in the context of a pandemic, but also aesthetically.

Underground containers, which store waste in hidden chambers, remove aboveground risks of

Jonas Törnblom (RIGHT) is Director at Envito and Tony Yates (BELOW) is Director at SLR Consulting



disease transmission and reduce the risk of attracting vermin in shared public spaces. This solution is becoming more prevalent in London and several suppliers have established a presence.

Automated waste collection systems (AWCS), also known as pneumatic waste collection systems, are another option. Not only do they store waste underground, limiting human interaction with waste and vermin, but they also transport waste automatically through an underground pipework to large containers, eliminating contact points between humans and waste, and reduce the need for heavy waste transportation by up to 90 per cent.

Whilst there is only one AWCS firm currently in the UK, it has a large-scale installation operating in Wembley and is in the process of installing a second system - Europe's largest - in Barking, where less than 500 waste collection inlets will replace 19,000 traditional on-street bins.

The risks of physical contact with potentially contagious waste, and thereby disease, must be taken seriously. Therefore, it would be advisable to minimise the need for manual handling of waste bags and containers, and design out interactions between waste collectors and residents wherever possible. This becomes even more important if London is subject to another lockdown.

Factors such as local storage capacity, the availability of skilled personnel and a system's ability to operate automatically, or even remotely, are also key points to be considered.

The Suburban Taskforce

Dr Dimitrios Panayotopoulos-Tsiros and Dr Lucy Natarajan
both of the Bartlett School of Planning (UCL)

From the perspective of a changing climate, some technologies have proven particularly resilient and have remained operational during some of the most severe storms.

Hurricane Sandy, for example, killed 72 Americans, affected 24 states, knocked out power to more than seven million people and caused an estimated \$70 billion in damage. However, when Hurricane Sandy hit the New Jersey coastline, flooding and destroying homes and entire streets, the area's AWCS remained operational. In fact, the system was one of the only public services to remain operational throughout the entire disaster. Surely there are lessons here from which London can learn.

Futureproofing waste management during a crisis

The fact that the majority of London's local authorities place bins and manual collections at the heart of their waste management strategy means that the capital is perpetually at risk; a precipice whereby a crisis – be it a pandemic or climate change – could negatively impact entire communities in a very short space of time.

It is time to embrace new methods and technologies; the potential costs for not doing so are far too great.

The Covid-19 crisis has been devastating and has focussed attention on the potential risks of waste management systems. Whether or not the capital is sufficiently prepared for the next one remains to be seen. ■

Jonas Törnblom with a 30 years executive background in the international environmental technology industry - and since 2017 advising companies, organisations and cities in the Nordic countries, Germany, Canada and China on cross sectional governance issues in the fields of energy, the environment and urban development.

Dr Tony Yates has 25 years in the waste management industry advising on all aspects of waste collection, management and disposal. He has provided independent technical advice on the Wembley and Barking AWCS installations.

The risks of physical contact with potentially contagious waste, and thereby disease, must be taken seriously

An Inquiry into the Future of the Suburbs

Suburbs, suburbia or the suburban 'condition' have over the years received various degrees of attention. Yet, despite the vast pool of research and policy initiatives, the lack of a contextual approach leads to one recurrent argument: that overall, much is asked of the suburbs with outcomes that do not necessarily represent or fulfil the needs and aspirations of local communities. Amidst the current environment of uncertainty and crisis and in reaction to the oversimplification and eventual disregard of suburbs, the Suburban Task Force calls for a reconceptualisation of what suburbs are – and represent – through a profoundly contextual lens. This alternative understanding must, at its core, reconcile the socio-economic, political and spatial features of suburban areas.

More than attempting to add to the existing pool of knowledge, the Suburban Task Force aims to investigate the challenges and opportunities facing suburbs and the ways in which they can be better supported in the future. Starting from the most elementary question, the Task Force asks what constitutes a suburb in 21st C Britain and whether there is such a definition to be found? Although it is understood that suburbs are distinct in nature from more rural or central urban areas, it is undeniable that the nature of suburbs varies spatially; not only between cities but among the suburbs of one city as well. Hence, in an attempt to concentrate efforts and to explore in depth the contextual attributes that characterise suburbs, the Task Force will focus at first on London's outer Boroughs.

The deeper more fundamental driver of this initiative is a recognition that people choose to reside and work in suburban areas at least partly on the basis that they offer a particular set of qualities not found in more central or rural areas. However, the conditions and expectations of any locality necessary change over time, and so there needs to be a wider acknowledgement that the challenges and solutions offered to suburban areas might not reflect the changing needs or expectations of local communities. Indeed, the nature of local governance, and the expectations of spatially just development are often distinct for suburban areas. As



policies have distinct spatial and social implications they are often experienced very differently by different groups within communities, which will create unique local challenges and opportunities. Therefore, policy implications need to be continually considered.

The Task Force aims to shed light on the experience of the suburban context today, this research seeks qualitative evidence from local people and their democratically elected representatives on their views and aspirations for the areas. This will be combined with quantitative data related to the configuration of the urban environment, such as demographics and economic wellbeing, transport infrastructure, as well as spatial and environmental characteristics. Together, this data will be assessed and reported with a view to helping local authorities and strategic planning actors at the regional scale to understand how suburban areas are evolving and might be supported as they change. This new understanding and knowledge is expected to feed into developing specific goals and visions in conjunction with localities and communities.

The Task Force also aims to synthesise what is already known about the nature of socio-economic activity in the suburbs. A call for evidence is out now for further evidence on the existing relations between selected suburbs and central London, as the point of orientation and magnet for their wider connections. The questions surround spatial and socio-economic elements and the logistic connections and 'flows' (i.e. socio-economic interactions) that exist between suburbs and London. We hope to uncover the local patterns of work, life and play, in relation to the condition of the built and natural environment, and relevance of current pattern of investment and expenditure. ■

SEE <https://suburban-taskforce.org/>

Making it happen: immediate opportunities, practical needs

Craig Blatchford and Gareth Fox think with active and full engagement the proposed planning changes could be a game changer

If it can deliver on its ambitions, there's much to welcome about the Planning for the Future White Paper as far as London is concerned: a stripped back Local Plan process with more focus on strategic decisions, clearer designations and a simpler, quicker planning application process – all while ensuring design quality, sustainability and the other characteristics that create successful places.

How well this vision works in reality, however, will come down to how deftly its principles can be translated into legislation, put into practice and then enforced. For many of us, this means tackling three key areas.

We need workable structures around developer contributions, public services and infrastructure, particularly for the replacement of S106 and CIL. The certainty of standard, nationally-set Infrastructure Levy charges needs to be blended with bespoke local measures usually dealt with through the S106 process and to reflect divergent land values.

The relationship between individual London Boroughs, the Mayor/GLA and Transport for London in the decision-making process needs clarifying. For example, will the referral process also need to be reviewed to align with the overall objectives of a more streamlined and accountable process?

Above all, local authorities need the leadership and resourcing to grapple with the big issues, particularly to consult on and create effective Local Plans that are right for their area and within the new 30-month timeframe. LPA teams must adapt and grow, and councils will need to look externally for more specialist advice to tackle the challenges we face around growth and housing without losing the heritage – and of course beauty – we all benefit from.

Supporting all of this, local engagement – which is already moving to more digital channels as a result of lockdown – will also be transformed, harnessing technology to reach out at an earlier stage to a broader base.

In the meantime, the direction of travel is clear and those bringing forward new development should accelerate as far as practical rather than

wait for the new shake-up to take effect.

For all the changes ahead, local authorities will still need to take decisions on the schemes coming before them. Immediate housing need isn't going to fall away and local authorities still need to work to meet housing delivery tests and five year supply, which in turn bring into play the presumption in favour of sustainable development where such requirements are not met. This all creates short term opportunities, and it would be counterproductive for the pace of delivery to slow as this wider restructuring takes place.

There will be challenges facing the London market in particular. For some authorities, especially the outer London Boroughs, the need to address housing supply is compounded by the presence of protected areas within their boundaries that seemingly remain off limits as far as the current reforms go. But there are also huge opportunities too – particularly the latest changes to the use class order.

Commercial assets now have greater possibilities to find their place in the 'new normal' and there is potential here for many parts of the capital, especially the Central Activities Zone, that has never been seen before.

Together with the General Permitted Development Order, the UCO changes will embed flexibility within the planning system in a way not seen in the post-war era. Landowners, asset managers and developers are now freer than ever before to repurpose struggling assets, unencumbered by a borderline obsolete land use categorisations and plan policy that prevents its loss.

In the extreme, we are in a world where the Gherkin could, in principle, could be converted into a multi-use retail, food and drink and leisure destination without there being any need to engage with the planning system. Central London gyms, health centres and clinics can become

The London market has potential to benefit from all of the changes currently being proposed

Craig Blatchford (RIGHT) is Head of Planning and Gareth Fox (BELOW) Associate at Montagu Evans



offices overnight. Supermarkets can become vast food halls.

Of course, in most cases such changes would not stack up commercially, but this does underline an important point. Realising the full potential of these freedoms will rely on innovative thinking, new commercial business models and a complete rethink of management strategies for commercial property portfolios.

All this comes at a time when the City in particular is reshaping and widening its offer to be more culture and leisure-led as well as a global business centre. These planning changes are an additional boost, especially for City Fringe and other locations where office values may not offer the best returns and owners can now reassess their options.

So, while there will be opportunities to bring forward proposals that respond to the White Paper's aims long-term, there also a moment, now, to progress schemes through to delivery before these changes take place.

The London market has potential to benefit from all of the changes currently being proposed. To make the most of them, we will need a change in approach to a more development plan-led system – but with active and full engagement this could be a game changer, especially for potential growth areas and the large scale urban renewal projects and estate regeneration that are an essential part of the capital's future. ■

COVID-19 has changed the property needs of businesses

The flexible working revolution is well underway and the commercial property sector must be adequately prepared for the oncoming shift in working culture thinks Paul Howells

The COVID-19 pandemic has radically altered society. Even at a time when the government is encouraging businesses to slowly transition back to the office, many are still working from home or implementing flexible working schedules for their employees. This will have a significant impact on the commercial property market.

Flexible working arrangements and co-working spaces were already lessening the need for businesses to subscribe to the traditional one-desk-per-person office culture that had dominated the corporate world for the last 80 years. While smaller companies have been able to adapt to changing employee needs, COVID-19 and the need to work from home made this a sudden necessity for businesses of all sizes and across all industries.

In my mind, the COVID-19 pandemic has forced employers to reassess their current processes and structures, and ultimately understand how flexible working arrangements can ultimately benefit them. These advantages extend from reduced operational costs to working in tech-enabled workspaces.

Heading towards the new normal

Accumulate Capital recently commissioned research to explore how fast the UK business community was heading towards the scenario outlined above. We surveyed more than 500 senior decisionmakers from businesses all over the UK.

Of those that were surveyed, 73 per cent believed businesses are going to be downsizing en masse as a result of the coronavirus pandemic over the next 12 months. What's more, 37 per cent of business leaders are actively planning to relocate their own companies to a smaller commercial space themselves.

This will undoubtedly have a massive impact on the commercial real estate market. Medium sized enterprises will downsize to smaller spaces, and smaller companies may even simply just rent a single room for meetings or a rotating selection of key staff members to be present for in-person decision making.

So, the question becomes, how will the commercial

Paul Howells is CEO of Accumulate Capital – an investment and property development firm. Accumulate Capital connects registered investors with developers in the property development finance sector to enable selected, high-yielding projects in the UK and overseas.

real estate industry accommodate these changing attitudes?

A sector in flux

Exactly half (50 per cent) of the decisionmakers spoken to by Accumulate Capital admitted that their preferences for commercial premises had changed, with 58 per cent stating that working from home will become their new norm.

Some may believe that the rise of co-working spaces in recent years is perfectly positioned to accommodate these shifting priorities. However, many of these spaces were more specifically designed to entice companies that foresaw themselves growing at a rapid rate. In other words, it pro-

Pessimistically minded operators may fear that COVID-19 has essentially ended the very idea of an office altogether... 57 per cent of businesses will still rely on a physical workspace in order to network and collaborate with partners and prospective clients.

vides an easy opportunity for businesses to expand their office space without needing to seek out a new real estate provider.

A look at the pricing structure of the most successful co-working space company, WeWork, is indicative of this. Factor in WeWork's emphasis on shared spaces for the occupants of any given premises, and it becomes clear that the traditional co-working space model is not equipped for this new era of uber-flexible office working; especially given the new need for social distancing.

So, what can commercial realtors and developers do to entice businesses back to the office?

Changing trends, changing spaces

Pessimistically minded operators in the commercial

Paul Howells is CEO of Accumulate Capital



property sector may fear that COVID-19 has essentially ended the very idea of an office altogether. However, our research showed that 57 per cent of businesses will still rely on a physical workspace in order to network and collaborate with partners and prospective clients.

Smaller, more flexible workspaces will inevitably become the new norm, then. Companies will want the freedom to occasionally have their staff mostly present for an important presentation or meeting, but not be weighed down by exorbitant rent prices for a space that can facilitate such meetings all the time. That's why it is important that those involved in the commercial property sector adapt to the changing needs of the market.

It may be worthwhile, then, for commercial property investors to seek out new opportunities in less central, but more accessible, areas. If the right social distancing measures are undertaken, a large property could well be sub-divided to meet the new needs of multiple different downsizing companies.

Finally, there are significant opportunities in many of the UK's rising regional hubs. The government has committed billions of pounds into the construction of infrastructure and new-build properties in the coming years. With market preference for commercial property changing, this could be an ample time for developers to address the needs of the post-COVID-19 workforce in the regions.

Of course, all this speculation must come with the caveat that a COVID-19 vaccine or second spike could well derail this trend. As it currently stands, however, the flexible working revolution is well underway, and the commercial property sector must be adequately prepared for the oncoming shift in working culture. The industry must respond to changing business needs and ensure the availability of commercial working spaces accordingly. ■

The right to build up is useful

The upward permitted development right can help tackle the housing crisis, argues Gary Hoban

Truly disgraceful. Damaging. A serious error. A striking failure. Populist but fallacious. Slums of the future. An uncontrolled experiment.

These are just some of the things architects and planners have been saying about the government's radical shake up of planning rules, which will initially see permitted development rights expanded before a whole new zonal planning system is eventually introduced.

While there are many legitimate concerns about these far-reaching proposals, could it be that the critics are missing the potential benefits of some of the more immediate changes?

Since last month property owners have been able to use expanded permitted development rights to add two storeys to purpose-built blocks of flats. For some this may conjure up nightmarish visions of profit-crazed developers opportunistically building on every available rooftop. But it makes me think of a small but vital "airspace" social housing project I'm leading in south-west London right now.

We are in the process of adding 71 desperately needed new social homes for elderly people on top of dated 1970s tower blocks owned by the Sutton Housing Association. We obtained planning permission in June under the old rules but it is highly likely we would have been able to build even more homes had it taken place this month.

Planners rejected our application to build two storeys on one of the blocks as it was close to a tall church. In the end we were given permission to build one additional storey. This meant we were unable to provide a further six new social homes at a time when there are 1.6m households on social housing waiting lists and Shelter estimates we need 690,000 social homes to give the over-55s struggling with high housing costs some security in old age.

Despite its proximity to the church, I firmly believe that the two-storey approach was suitable for the site and surroundings. The building was wide and low and the extra storey could have been sensitively and sympathetically handled.

This is, of course, crucial. If we had obtained prior approval under permitted development rights it would have been incumbent on us to make sure the design complemented rather than detracted from the look and feel of the rest of neighbourhood.

The density of rooftop extensions may be another concern. Sutton were very clear about what they considered an appropriate number of flats for the space but we were still able to exceed their housing yield by six per cent. However, not all clients will be as conscientious so it will be vital architects ensure that the freedoms that come with these changes are wielded responsibly.

It is unlikely to be a complete free-for-all. Adding

Gary Hoban is director at Hoban Design



more than one storey to a building usually requires new structural support, along with new lifts, stairs and fire escapes. These should all still require formal planning.

This is clear from our own experience. Sutton Housing Society didn't just settle for additional rooftop homes, it upgraded the 50-year-old buildings below. We were asked to design new facades, windows and improved communal facilities to the long-term benefit of existing and new residents. Yet it can't be denied that some unscrupulous developers will seek to game the system for their own advantage. This is a real risk and I share the concerns of others in the profession.

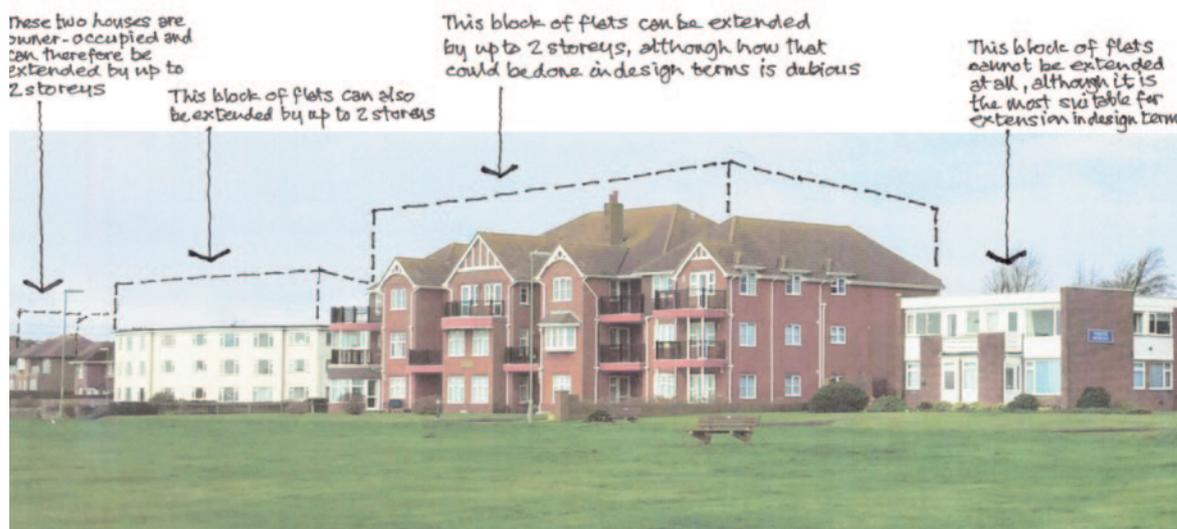
However, I can also see how responsible developers, housing associations and even councils could use these rights to build upwards, providing some of the millions of new homes we need to tackle the housing crisis responsibly.

Whatever you might think of these permitted development rights, they are now in place. Responsible architects must learn how to use these opportunities to provide much-needed, liveable, well-designed new homes in the underused spaces above our heads. ■

First published in *BDonline* with kind consent

LEFT: How the new PD rights will work. Analysis by Andrew Rogers from the ACA September Newsletter

HOW THE NEW UPWARDS EXTENSION P.D. RIGHTS WILL WORK :



CLIFF-TOP BUILDINGS AT BARTON-ON-SEA, HAMPSHIRE

The unintended ending of airspace development?

The unintended consequence of this legislation is that residents are stuck in buildings that are less safe than they would otherwise be thinks Mani Khuroya

The government's recently published legislation following the 'Building a Safer Future' consultation signalled many welcome changes that should strengthen our building safety regime. Improving of the Fire Safety Order for existing buildings through the Fire Safety Bill is positive and reflects our experience of old buildings which are unsafe by current standards. This naturally aligns with the aims of airspace development, owing to the upgrade works to the whole building that take place when developers add an additional storey or more. However, just two of the new changes could spell the end of airspace through unintended consequences, something at odds with Robert Jenrick's recently published permitted development right allowing upwards extensions on existing buildings.

The consultation paper proposes to lower the '18-metre height threshold to at least 11 metres' for the 'current ban on the use of combustible materials in the external walls of high-rise buildings'. This is likely to be brought in via an amendment to Regulation 7 which is an absolute requirement for non-combustibles (what we call 'A2-s1, d0 Euroclass or better'). The practical effect of this is that only mineral wool insulations are likely to be allowed and the vast majority of existing building stock will not comply with this requirement.

When it comes to airspace, Regulation 7 is not usually applicable due to FAQ (1) of the Building (Amendment) Regulations 2018, however, this exception only applies when the building was already a 'relevant building' prior to the development. Thus, if the airspace development pushes it into a new threshold, adding a storey above 11m when it did not have one before, the development will need to comply. This will effectively illegalise airspace development on the vast majority of four storey buildings (apart from the few exceptions that use solid wall construction), while buildings that are already over four storeys will be exempt.

The second change comes via amendments to Approved Document B stating that 'blocks of flats with a top storey more than 11m above ground level should be fitted with a sprinkler system.'

This means that any airspace developer will require access to the homes of every existing leaseholder which will not only cause disruption to residents, but means that residents can be held to ransom with just one owner being able to stop an improvement project which the vast majority of the block supports. Although there have now been two circulars that suggest that alternatives will be considered, most Fire Engineering firms and Approved Inspectors we consulted with were not aware of this as a potential solution and there is no clarity on the alternative 'additional protection' that would be required.

These changes threaten to unintentionally end airspace development and mean that residents are stuck in buildings that might have been compliant at the time they were built but would not get sign off under today's regulations, rather than allowing them to benefit from upgrade works that accompany an airspace project.

Given the greater burden placed on the building owners and managers by the updated Fire Safety Bill and new regulatory regime for Accountable Persons, airspace development offers an excellent way to release value thereby covering the cost of the works required to make the building fire safe – which should always be the

Mani Khuroya is managing director of Fruition Properties



number one priority.

Experienced airspace developers are well placed to advise on the extent of the safety works required and can project manage them, working hand in hand with residents, owners and industry leading fire engineering firms to come up with a detailed Fire Strategy. Often this includes upgrading the building's alarm systems, removing or encasing potential combustible material in communal areas, installing fire doors and installing fire-fighting shafts for larger developments.

The unintended consequence of this legislation is that residents are stuck in buildings that are less safe than they would otherwise be, with costs that they would not otherwise have. We hope the government will take this into consideration when implementing the new legislation, >>>



The View – Upper Richmond Road

>>> particularly when it has otherwise been so vocal about encouraging airspace development. ■

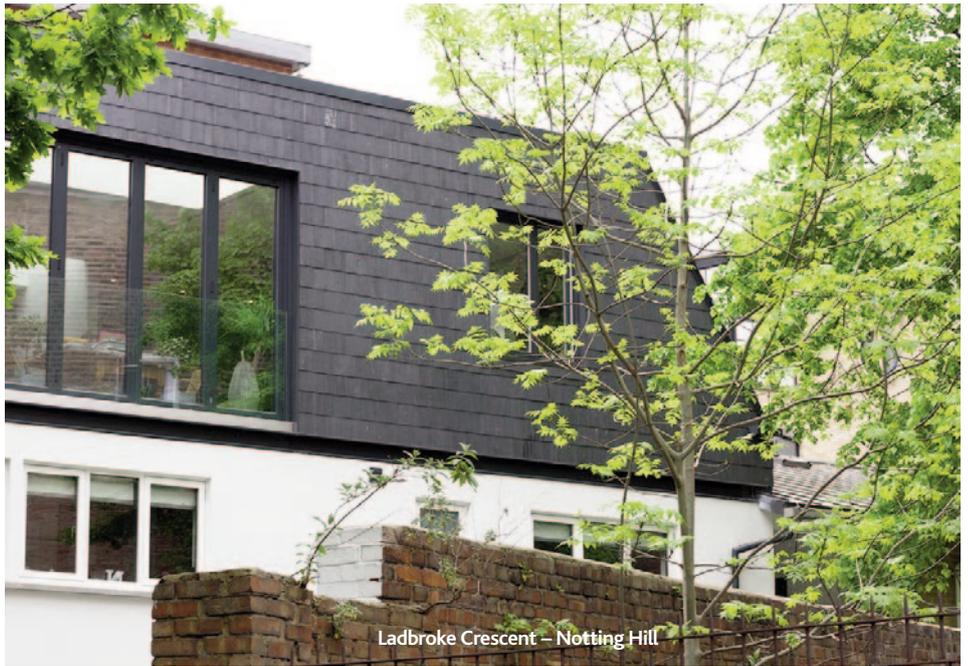
Examples of our successful airspace developments

The View – Upper Richmond Road, SW15: For this project, we worked with leaseholders in this tired 1970s block to create four new apartments in an additional floor above the existing building. In just 32 weeks, we had built the new homes using innovative methods of construction, refurbished the existing internal communal areas, updated the façade and windows, and re-landscaped the gardens and driveway. New cycle and bin stores, post boxes and an audio-visual entry system were also provided. Now completed, the existing residents benefit from higher value apartments and they share running costs with the owners of the new apartments, which has reduced their annual service charge by 25 per cent..

Ladbroke Crescent – Notting Hill, W11: We delivered Ladbroke Crescent in partnership with the existing owner of one of the four flats. Through the addition of an extra floor, the dated flat was transformed into a stunning light-filled duplex with a modern, open plan living space ideal for family living. The entire block was refreshed with a modern uplift to align it with the neighbouring stucco-fronted Victorian terraces, which included re-rendering, slate cladding and improved communal areas.

The One – Porchester Road, W2: This was an interesting project liaising closely with Young’s Brewery to deliver eight contemporary apartments in the airspace above the existing pub. Despite the need to build an additional floor, we successfully navigated the build over a busy junction so that the pub was able to remain fully operational. The scaffolding was designed to avoid obstruction of the retail frontage and to ensure the corner entrance to the pub was easily accessible. This allowed the pub to continue to attract customers whilst new value was added.

The Carob Tree – Highgate Road, NW5: Here, we created three new homes through the refurbishment of the existing upper floors and addition of one new floor above an existing restaurant – The Carob Tree. The owner was initially weary of the impact to the restaurant from construction, where they expected



Ladbroke Crescent – Notting Hill

business to drop by over 20% during the entire build phase. However, we worked closely with the owner to develop a programme of works that considered the impact on his business. In turn, the restaurant only had to close for five weeks, which was carefully scheduled to happen during a quieter trading period.



The View – Upper Richmond Road,



The One – Porchester Road

Ladbroke Crescent – Notting Hill
The Carob Tree – Highgate Road



What the White Paper could – and should – do to reform developer contributions

The current times require less fanfare but more agility
argue Iain Gilbey, Jamie Lockerbie and Sue Chadwick

What reform could look like

As with other issues, the Government's proposals are spread through the White Paper. The Prime Minister's foreword promises "radical reform" so that developers can no longer "dodge their obligations" while the Introduction argues for development supported by community facilities and simpler viability assessments, and criticises the current processes for their length and lack of clarity. The next broad summary of the overall proposals introduces the notion of a new Infrastructure Levy that will "sweep away" the need for negotiations, deliver more infrastructure and be wider in scope than current agreements.

Infrastructure delivery is addressed in detail under Pillar 3. Section 106 agreements are criticised for a lack of clarity, dependence on complex viability assessments, and delaying the delivery process. CIL contributions are seen as insufficiently flexible, and responsible for creating cashflow issues for developers, while local authorities come under fire for being "slow to spend" it.

Within the specific proposals the government asserts (Proposal 19) that the new Levy will create a system that is more responsive, transparent, consistent and fair, and that captures more of the land value uplift because it is based on a "flat-rate, valued-based charge" based on the final value of a development (subject to minimum value thresholds). It could not be charged until properties were occupied but local authorities could borrow against expected revenues.

The new Levy could also be charged on some changes of use and other automatically permitted types of development, specifically including office to residential conversions and the new demolition and rebuild permitted development rights (Proposal 20). It could also allow for on-site delivery of affordable housing, including the new First Homes (Proposal 21) and could morph back into a financial contribution where there is no uptake by providers.

Under Proposal 22 it looks as though the 2008 Act definition of 'infrastructure' could be replaced with the relaxed restrictions for neighbourhood por-

tions: the "provision, improvement, replacement, operation or maintenance of infrastructure; or anything else that is concerned with addressing the demands that development places on the area." Finally, buried deep within Proposal 23 there is the suggestion that a "small proportion" of the Levy could be used to cover costs – including the preparation and review of Local Plans and design codes and enforcement activities.

What reform should look like

The White Paper has attracted a lot of comment, both positive and negative. Our view is that, if there were an easy way to solve the problem of how to turn development uplift into good quality infrastructure that meets all needs, someone would have found it by now.

Rather than aim to reform the entire system in the middle of a global pandemic and the worst recession in more than a decade, we suggest retention of the system of planning obligations but with some small but significant changes that would deliver lasting positive effects for minimal administrative pain.

Changes to legislation

- Replace the current 'purposes' a)-d) of section 106 and replace them with wider, more general, power to secure obligations of any nature but subject to compliance with the tests set out in Regulation 122. This would allow s.106 agreements to lawfully secure, for example, measures such as residents not being permitted to apply for parking permits, land transfers to the local authority or other third parties and to enter into contracts in the future. This would also avoid the need for the parties to have to undertake 'work around' process such as additional agreements and use of restrictions etc on the register of title to the property.
- This simplified s.106 could also be amended to allow local authorities to contract with themselves and ensure that the obligations are binding on successors in title and function. This would deal with the significant complexities that currently exist when a local planning authority is also the land

Iain Gilbey and Jamie Lockerbie are planning partners, and Dr Sue Chadwick, is a strategic planning advisor at Pinsent Masons, London



- owner and therefore needs to 'contract with itself'.
- The cost of the on-site delivery of infrastructure should be an allowable deduction from the new infrastructure levy. This could be legitimised through an amendment to the CIL Regulations and with the value of the deduction formally recorded in the 106 agreement.
- Finally we suggest that guidance and/or possibly legislation is changed to explicitly state that a local authority is able to, and should, covenant back to the developer to deliver infrastructure where the developer is paying significant sums towards the provision of infrastructure that is necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms.

Changes to policy

- The NPPG should be amended to encourage planning authorities to start negotiating the agreement itself promptly following validation of the >>>

>>> planning application, with external solicitors appointed (at the applicant's cost) at that point if there are insufficient resources in-house. Costs could be covered via the usual solicitor's undertakings or covered in a Planning Performance Agreement. The decision-making committee would have a much clearer picture of what was being approved if the detail was available at the time of the committee meeting and could also take into account the extent to which the developer engaged with the s106 negotiation process.

- The PPG should be updated to state that where a local authority is seeking large financial contributions to deliver specific infrastructure then the authority is strongly encouraged to enter into a reciprocal commitment to delivery.

Other changes

- As well as being able to borrow against the costs of anticipated funding, options should be explored to allow a developer to borrow from the local authority to secure delivery of large scale infrastructure. This could (subject to reformed State Aid considerations) be part of the new section 106 so that an obligation to recover those costs from other schemes provided the proportion is fair and reasonable (an enhanced "pooling"

system that reflects the nature of funding of infrastructure serving many projects).

- Create an arbitration process for resolving disputes on section 106 agreements. This new body could deal with a range of issues including
 - Imposing sanctions on parties that refuse to meet their obligations, including the local authorities and/or applicants who delay negotiations or refuse to engage/move drafts on
 - Issues of alleged breach (including securing enforcement measures) where a local authority has entered into a section 106 agreement with itself as landowner as per our suggestion above
 - Arguments on whether or not proposals comply with whatever legal tests (e.g. Regulation 122) are in place;
 - Disputes about viability issues
 - Settling drafting points where parties have reached an expensive impasse;

The arbitrator could have powers to impose penal costs in the event of a vexatious and unreasonable referrals and scope to involve the public much more widely than is usually the case. Referral fees could be set at a level so as to ensure it is self-funded and therefore not an additional cost to the public purse.

Conclusion

The combined experience of the Pinsent Masons London planning team means that we have over the years seen section 52 replaced with section 106, muddled through interpreting Circulars 16/91 and 1/97, flirted with the Planning Gain Supplement, adjusted to accommodate MCIL, survived the partial introduction of CIL and still find ourselves mostly using section 106 agreements as the least worst way of delivering on-site infrastructure in a flexible way within the confines of development viability. We have also lived through numerous attempts by governments to reform the system – with mixed results.

It is always tempting for a government to promise a fresh start rather than deal with the current complexities of the system – and governments have been planning reform of the system almost since the first planning act of 1909. The current times require less fanfare but more agility - a response that works within the existing system to deliver small effective changes.

Some of our proposals need changes to legislation and might take time, but others could, with energy and motivation, be in place by the time we really are 'building back better'. We commend them to the Government. ■



The banner features a background image of a modern building's steel framework. In the top left corner is the Planning Portal logo, and in the top right corner is the CPD Certified logo. The main text is centered and reads:

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Office rethinks should stem from opportunity, not fear

Paul Finch thinks the only thing we have to fear is fear itself

'As the office sector faces seas of change, we challenge you to imagine a better future. Entrants are encouraged to think outside the box to present innovative and thought-provoking solutions that bring to life how workspace may change over the next five years.'

Thus the preamble to details of a British Council for Offices ideas competition, aimed at its younger 'NextGen' members. This is only the second time that such a competition has taken place, but older readers may remember a famous predecessor won by Andrew Chadwick in the 1990s on the same sort of subject. His suggestion was that the office of the future would comprise what today we would call a laptop.

So challenges to the conventional office have been around for a long time. The question of how post-pandemic conditions will affect it will no doubt allude to existing trends. Remote working isn't new, 'hub' or 'club' office environments have been with us for much of this century. The serviced office, WeWork-style shared space and the recent rise of Zoom and Teams meetings are all proof that change is the only constant.

What seems to have gained currency in the mainstream media is the idea that the office as we know it is finished. To some extent that idea is reflected by what the BCO suggests competition entrants might address:

- Redefining the purpose of the physical office space: Why work in the office when you can work anywhere?
- Shifting work patterns: The rise of working remotely and more flexibly, with teams connected via technology.
- Increased localism: The potential for suburban hubs with blended uses, to support traditional city office locations.
- Reduced densities of office buildings: Opportunities for alternative uses or sustainable re-use to drive greater utilisation and value.
- Designing Inclusively: Intergenerational working, mentorship and work experience opportunities.

- Increased data tracking, gathering and analysis: To ensure the office is a safe environment to visit.
- Hygienic and healthy buildings: What they require and the role of new technologies to accelerate this.

There are other areas for examination which with luck will emerge, both in the competition and more generally for discussion across the sector. For example:

- What materials could we use to counteract virus spread on ironmongery and the myriad things we touch in the workspace, from lift buttons to keyboards? For example bronze or graphene. (Unless recently reported research, suggesting that touched surfaces are not a source of virus spread, is WHO-endorsed)
- What makes an office environment more appealing than 'workspace' inserted into homes? What are the good bits about home that might transfer? How can office environments lift the spirits?
- How could we develop ideas about the multi-use foyer, including using it for visitor meetings?
- Should the default idea about office buildings be that they are workspace-led hybrids?
- Should the office be a 'universal building', as pioneered through projects like the White Collar Factory, where plug-in operations could replace offices if necessary? The assumption is that the 'office' is a long-life building rather than assumed to be redundant after 25 years.

The key to creating successful new futures for the workplace lies in the attractions of human interaction, which is very different on screen, and is even more different/difficult if you are communicating with colleagues that you have never had the chance to meet face-to-face. Most people like people – so the question is how to make the office the best environment in which to interact.

Employment problems are currently associated with shops and hospitality rather than office-based activities. The former will benefit from the health of the latter, so there is a strategic imperative for the latter to flourish. This may well mean more hybrid developments, flexible uses, generous new space

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standards, new amenities and so on, but this will be underwritten by office activity and tenants paying rent for newly appropriate space and facilities.

In short, office development and retrofit will be a focus for new thinking and constructive improvement. The only thing we have to fear is fear itself. ■

First published in Property Week with kind consent

BELOW:

Frank Lloyd Wright's Larkin Building in Buffalo, one of the first office buildings

