

The 55+ inclusive city in a 75+ inclusive era

How can London meet the challenge of almost a half increase of the over-55s and a doubling of the over-75s over the next two decades asks Lars Christian

As the oldest baby boomers reach 75, generation X is reaching 55. How ready are our streets, cul-de-sacs, communities, neighbourhoods, parishes, suburbs, villages, centres, towns and boroughs of London for the over-55s century? How can the boroughs and the Mayor prepare? What can they do differently? Who can be in the forefront? What can London learn from other towns, cities and nations? And how can the city, the London Plan and the boroughs plans better prepare for the 55+ inclusive city?

This article outlines six recommendations for a more over 55+ inclusive inner and outer city, boroughs and suburbs. Where generation Y and Z mutually exchange favours and tasks with the both the 55+ and the 75+ generations. Where next-door-neighbours and grandparents offer each other a helping hand, not necessarily out of charity, but maybe as a barter, where time is exchanged for time. Where neighbours with different skills and experiences gain. In an era where both grandparents and grandchildren are living increasingly further apart, gain. A win win for all inhabitants of the city, irrespective of age, resources and background.

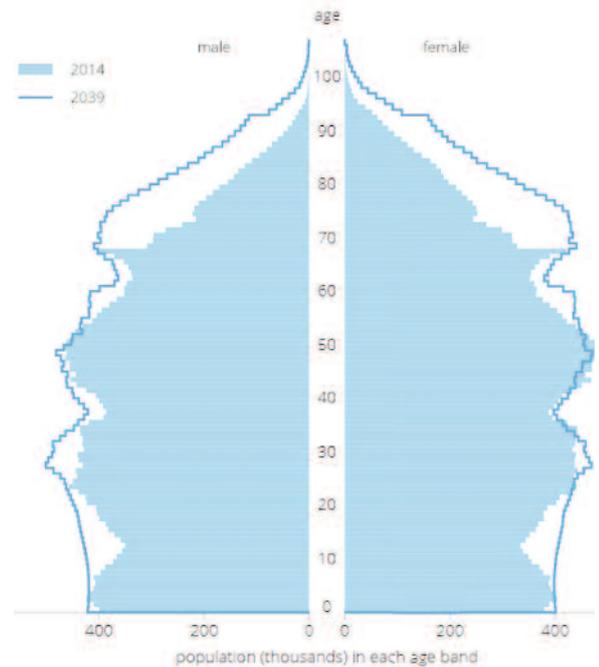
This article coincides with the publication of the revised London Plan, the TCPA guide Creating Health Promoting Environments, and the upcoming second draft of the Greater Manchester Spatial Framework, all of which may benefit from a greater focus on the over-55s. According to Harvard University, baby boomers and generations X, Y and Z are born between 1945, 1965, 1985, 2005 and 2025 respectively.

55+ and 75+ inclusive homes

The over 55s and 75s could increasingly live differently from family-with-children neighbourhoods after their children move away from home. In an era where maybe as many as one in four new homes in London could be carefully designed to cater for 55+ and 75+ Londoners. With a broad mixture of owner occupied, subsidised rent, market rent and shared ownership, typically delivered by housing associations and private developers, in cooperation with the Mayor and the boroughs.

To encourage a kind of resizing, downsizing or re-tuning – depending on the neighbourhood, suburb and borough in question – and acknowledge that half of the over 75s live alone. In an era, where maybe twice as many 55+ and 75+ Londoners could chose to live in more urban than suburban neighbourhoods – on borough, non-for-profit and privately owned land alike. In purpose designed apartment or mansion blocks, typically with balconies, communal rooftop terraces and gardens as well as playgrounds for visiting grandchildren.

In neighbourhoods where 55+ and 75+ Londoners can benefit from more suitable and relevant facilities and services conveniently located within walking distance. With shared e-bikes and car clubs, and benches at street corners with priority for the 55+.



ABOVE: Figure 2 shows the increase in UK inhabitants by age from 2014 to 2039, showing particular steep increase for the over-70s.

All typically located within a third of a mile of a high street – and a train, tube or tram station where relevant – in inner boroughs. Or within half a mile radius in e-bike friendly neighbourhoods in outer boroughs.

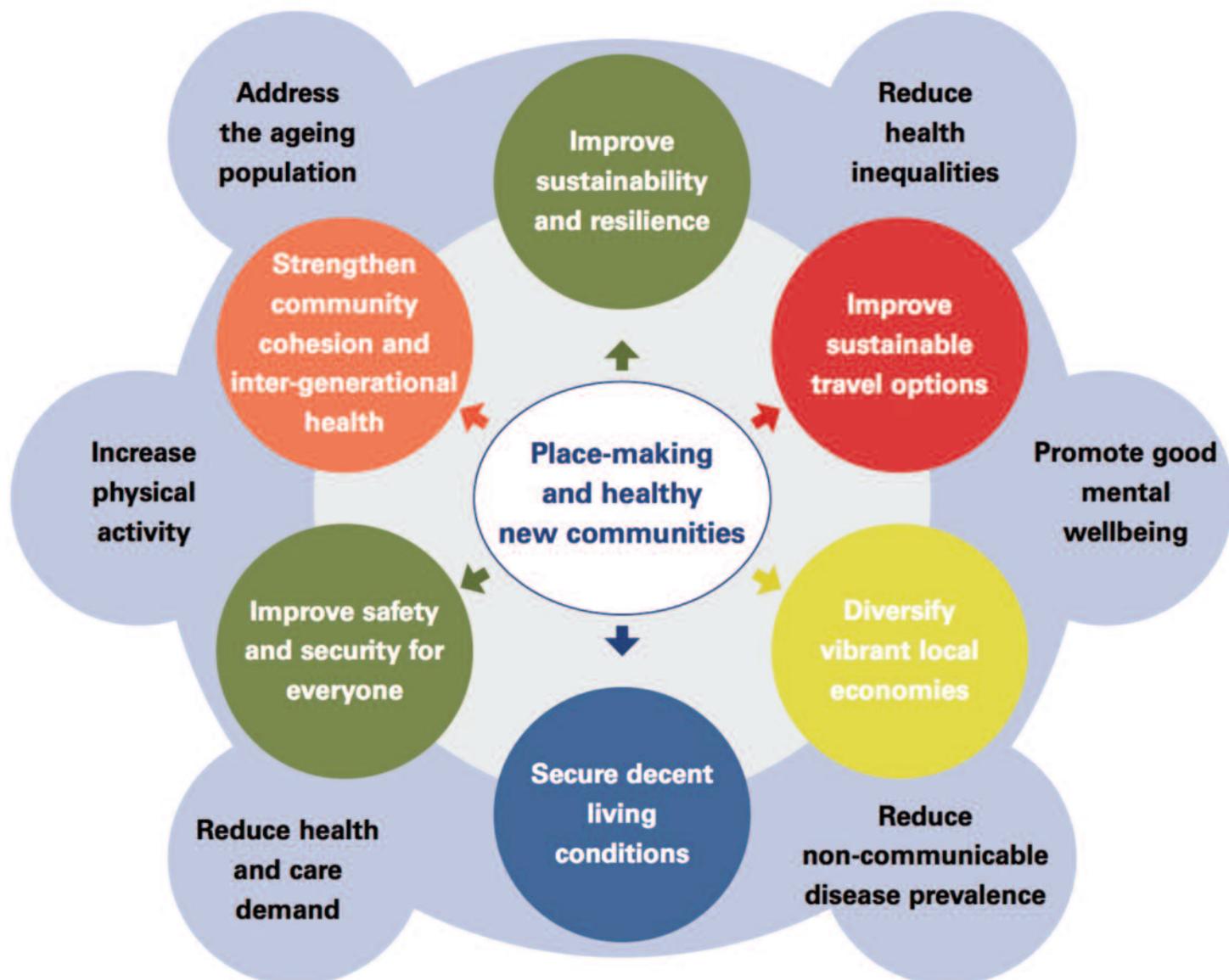
Sharing & volunteering

Despite the UK's long tradition of Christianity, many Londoners have a diminishing experience of sharing or volunteering. The post-war housing model, the welfare state and the spatial layout of neighbourhoods may have all contributed to the present situation. In a society where public provided services are the norm, with reduced or low input and expectations from adolescents, adults and the elderly alike. Except for a large minority who contribute substantially – often involving one's own children, parents or other close family members.

Looking after and enhancing once neighbourhood's common spaces is one aspect. Another is mutually supporting neighbours in need. Where dedicating a couple of hours a day or week or a few half days a week of sharing or volunteering could be the norm – by adolescent, parents and the 55+ alike. The latter group taking advantage of improved health and physical well being. Sometimes with several decades of retirement – with the >>>



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The multiple benefits of place-making and healthy new communities

ABOVE:
Figure 1 is from the TCPA practical guide 8, Creating Health Promoting Environments (2017)

>>> present life expectancy at birth forecasted to exceed 90 for women in one third of London boroughs and 88 for men in one quarter of boroughs within two decades.

However, the physical fabric of London's homes, gardens, parks, neighbourhoods, high streets, town centres and boroughs need to better accommodate enhanced areas, spaces and facilities for greater opportunity of sharing, mutual support and volunteering. Similarly applies to our own or adjacent buildings, properties, streets, street blocks, local play and sport grounds or courts, nurseries, schools, allotments and similar to better cater for more sharing and volunteering.

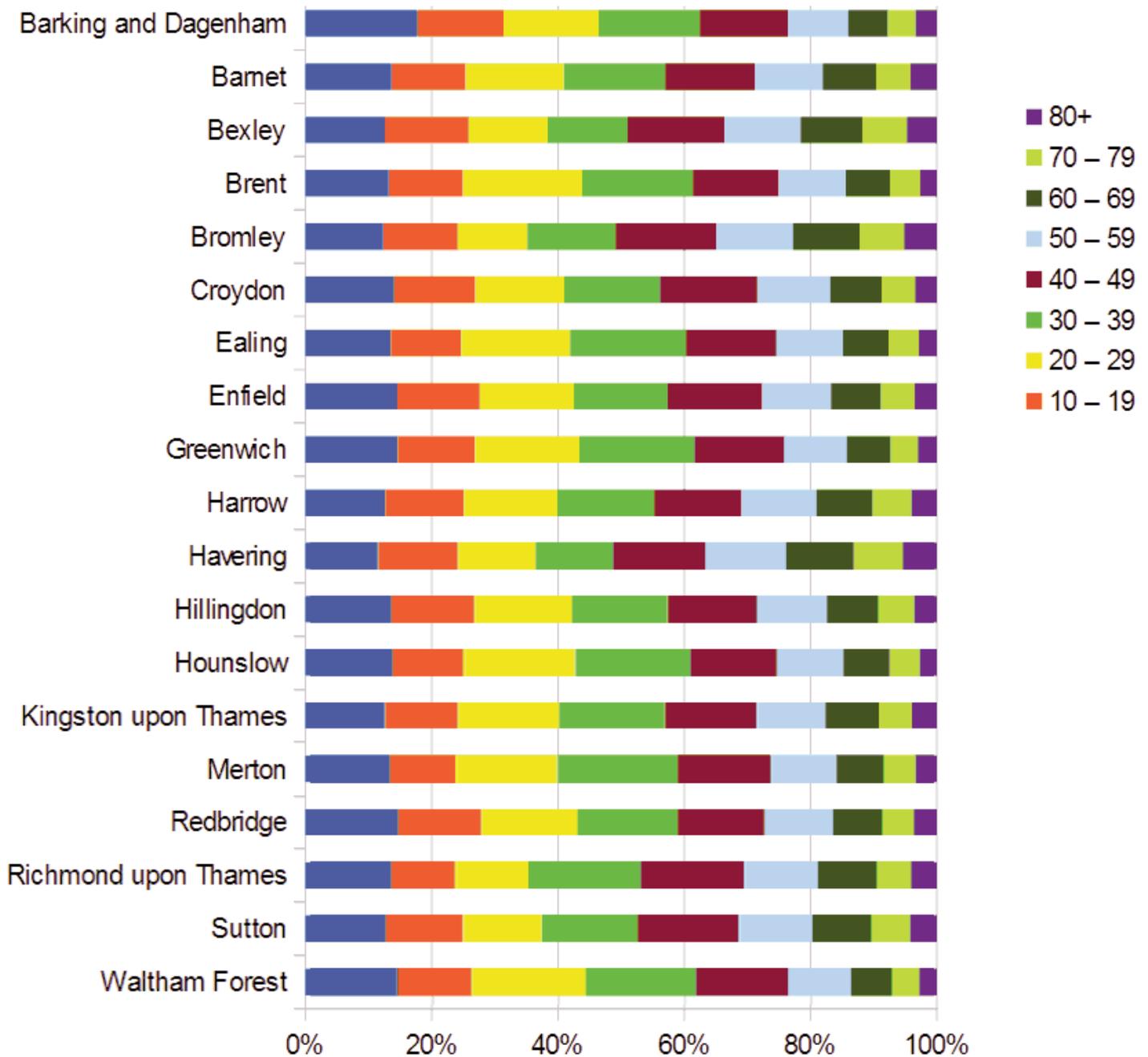
Grandparent and grandchildren exchange

In the 55+ inclusive city, the 55+ could play an enhanced role in caring for the young, and the young caring for the over 75s. In an era where families live further apart, grandparents could organise themselves so that they can look after friends-of-friends' grandchildren, as part of mutual exchange partnerships. And for the young to spend time

with the 75+, whilst at school or university. So that spending a regular part of retirement looking after friends-of-friends' grandchildren a few times a week becomes the norm rather than the exception. Accompanying the 'grandchildren' to and from nursery and school or spending afternoons, evenings or weekends in the park, playground, sports field etc. But to encourage and accommodate more frequent relation between the young and the 55+, social and physical neighbourhood facilities and infrastructure must physically and organisationally adapt and change. So that with time, some can be relocated adjacent to one another, and others can incorporate facilities frequented by the young and the 55+ within the same building or premises. Thus providing an added incentive for the 55+ to frequent facilities that at present typically cater for the under-55s rather than the over-55s.

Neighbourhood facilities & meeting places

Improving specialised neighbourhood facilities should go hand in hand with improving parks, gardens, pedestrian and



high streets. Typically located for multiple usages, so that the young and adults alike can enjoy parallel activities in the same or adjacent locations. With facilities allowing organised and random encounters between residents, visitors and their families. Typically with ambulant berrista, drinks and healthy snacks e-bikes or e-vans – where and when sufficient demand is present.

Similarly, larger office, commercial and residential developments could increasingly include sports halls, sports courts, pre-school nurseries and gyms. Either primarily for employees and customers only. Or ideally also accessible to local inhabitants, 55+ only or all ages alike. Carefully equipped for grandparents', grandchildren's as well as parents' and adolescents' needs and aspirations. To promote social inclusion and quality of life for all, as the number of 75+ Londoners is forecast to double within two decades.

Physical activity & mental health

One in four exercise less than half an hour a week and over half of Londoners are overweight according to Public Health England. This has to change. London's towns centres, boroughs and suburbs need to adapt to allow all inhabitants the opportunity to achieve the recommended half an hour of physical activity a day. Ideally whilst going about their daily life and chores – within, to and from their home, work, leisure and retail neighbourhood – or whilst meeting neighbours, friends and relatives.

Neighbourhoods offering all Londoners including children, adolescents, the 55+ and the 75+ with several free or low cost opportunities a day to be physical active – indoors and outdoors. Improving life expectancy as well as providing a path to a mentally and physically healthy life style, social inclusion and quality of life – from childhood and teenagehood through to adulthood, retirement and old age. Reducing the number of years of poor >>>

ABOVE:
Figure 3 shows a particular high proportion of over-60s in six to ten London boroughs in 2011, making up more than 1 in 5 to 1 in 6 inhabitants.

>>> health to a minimum – mentally as well as physically – irrespective of resources and background.

Versatile mobility & e-cycling

55+ Londoners could benefit from more diversity in their travel habits, depending on whether they have young children, teenage children, no children, or whether they still work or not. Walking, cycling, e-cycling, car/bike sharing and public transport are the six most obvious alternatives for the 55+ who still hold on to individual car ownership and car driving.

Local incentives for more versatile mobility for the 55+ includes denser or more varied density neighbourhoods; more physically segregated e-bike and bike lanes; more pedestrian friendly streets and street block structure. As well as financial incentives for less car parking and lower car ownership in exchange for more car, e-car and e-bike sharing. Five to ten folding the three latter by abolishing VAT, excise and fuel duties – especially in the outer boroughs where car ownership is typically still the norm.

For a majority of 55+ Londoners to embrace e-cycling as their main form of individual transport, e-cycling requires physically segregated lanes along busy roads, priority at junctions. As well as e-parking at home, job, retail, service and town centres. E-cycling combined with less car parking, denser neighbourhoods and more frequent physical exercise.

Afterword

London has a relative young population, with a million new jobs created during the last decade, many taken up by new arrivals from across the UK, the EU and further afield. However, with nine million inhabitants, London may soon

have the highest concentration of 75+ inhabitants in Europe – together with three other cities, Istanbul, Moscow and Paris, the Randstad and the Rhein-Ruhr metropolitan regions. Other big cities from where lessons may be learned about how to prepare for the 55+ inclusive urban era, are Berlin, Madrid, Milano and Rome – each with about half the inhabitants of London.

How London meets the challenge of almost a half increase of the over-55s and a doubling of the over-75s within the next two decades may determine how successful the city will be in remaining a world-leading city in generations to come. As businesses and employees not only seek to locate in cities with world class quality of life for working adults and families but also where the elderly with a wide range of income, can maintain their quality of life through their retirement.

In a city where 55+ inhabitants can be certain of not only receiving world class health and public services. And where they can be certain of living in apartments, neighbourhoods and town centres carefully adapted to their varied and sometimes complex needs. Whether they are men, women, couples or singles; 55+, 75+ or 95+ years old. Irrespective of educational, ethnic or professional background or experience. Or distance to close family and relatives. ■

Further reading:

<https://www.theguardian.com/science/2017/dec/06/inequalities-among-older-people-especially-women-shameful>
<https://www.theguardian.com/inequality/2017/dec/09/ladder-england-old-est-youngest-towns-manchester-minehead>
<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/feb/11/how-build-healthy-city-copenhagen-reveals-its-secrets-happiness>
<https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/planning/implementing-london-plan/supplementary-planning-guidance/social-infrastructure>
<http://www.independent.co.uk/travel/news-and-advice/richest-happiest-healthiest-countries-world-new-zealand-norway-finland-switzerland-canada-travel-a8206711.html>

Nine key habits

Dan Buettner identifies nine key habits that people living in five of the worlds longest and healthiest places share (Blue Zone Solution 2015):

- They keep moving
- They have a sense of purpose
- They have ways of de-stressing
- They only eat enough to be 80% full
- They eat mainly beans, with vegetables, fruit and whole grains
- They drink moderate amounts of wine
- They're part of a religious community
- Have close family ties
- Have good friends and socialise