

What kind of London do Londoners want?

Good growth needs to be embraced as a “win-win” for London’s neighbourhoods says Michael Bach

Looking back in 15 years time, will Londoners be happy with how their city and their neighbourhood has changed?

London, particularly Inner London, is changing fast and there is a huge amount of development in the pipeline inherited from the last administration – some 400+ tall buildings. This is a major challenge and, from a community perspective, a large unwanted legacy.

Sadiq Khan’s “A City for all Londoners” poses major questions about how we should accommodate the scale of growth. But there is a golden thread that runs through the document, which is about creating a London with which ordinary Londoners will be comfortable with and from which they can benefit.

Recognising the need for “good growth”

The document recognises that there will be considerable growth – the real issue is how well and how sensitively these pressures will be handled. Above all, it is concerned that current residents should feel comfortable with the scale of change at the local level and that these new developments create desirable places to be. We can increase density without sacrificing the “feel” of these places.

But accommodating rising population, economic growth and other activities in London will change our experience of the city. We want to avoid the mistakes of the past, especially of the last decade. We must ensure that we do not repeat this.

We welcome and support the principles of “good growth”. We recognise the need for increased densities, but these need to be used creatively to make more sustainable neighbourhoods, with more accessible and affordable housing and able to support accessible local services. Good growth needs to be designed to include improved social infrastructure.

At present much growth is not planned as part of an integrated approach to creating or maintaining sustainable communities with a wide range of accessible local services, with places and space where people come together. We must start building and supporting accessible, walkable, sustain-

able and resilient neighbourhoods.

Right kind of housing

We fully endorse the aim of delivering more, better, more affordable homes for the Londoners who need them. The scale of the challenge is huge, but it needs to be carefully tailored to the special circumstances of London. Building more of the right kinds of housing – housing that will meet the needs of Londoners is essential. In Inner London many large sites, which should be a real opportunity for meeting this need have been wasted on housing geared to an overseas investment market. This has dictated the type and scale of the products – large, unaffordable and making no contribution to meeting objectively-assessed housing need.

Good architecture and design

The document stresses that good architecture and high-quality design is essential, but it must be responsive to place and respect the distinct character of the different parts of the city – the “villages” and urban quarters – which give these neighbourhoods and London its character.

It uses the much-used mantra that higher density does not necessarily mean high-rise – so what role should tall buildings play in the future of London?

Accommodating rising population, economic growth and other activities in London will change our experience of the city.

At present the London Plan appears to ask why not, rather why do we need more tall buildings. If tall buildings are not essential to achieving higher densities, proposals need to demonstrate both the need for and the appropriateness of high-rise/tall buildings. The onus of proof should be on justifying why they are the preferred solution.

We welcome the statement that tall buildings will only be permitted if they can add value to the existing community, and that they must make a positive contribution to streetscape and the skyline, as well as their local impact at street level with regard to activities and the microclimate.

The Mayor still appears to consider that there is



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a continuing role for tall buildings in the future of London. However, few make a positive contribution to the character of London – too many have been allowed, which now need to be reassessed against tougher tests to assess their appropriateness for London and their impact on the character of London’s neighbourhoods.

Inclusive Neighbourhoods

We believe that the concept of inclusive neighbourhoods should be the basic building block for supporting London’s local communities.

This is so much more than the current London Plan’s “lifetime neighbourhoods” – it is not just about a better mix of adaptable, lifetime housing, but an approach which embraces all the ingredients needed to support and maintain accessible, walkable, sustainable, resilient neighbourhoods.

It will mean harnessing additional density to support a wider range of local services within easy walking distance, to ensure that communities are strengthened by reinstating lost facilities, providing better access to local social infrastructure (child-care, primary school, open space, GP surgery, local shops, meeting places). It will only happen if we plan for it.

The new London Plan will need to embrace neighbourhoods as the building block on which to build to create more sustainable, more inclusive and resilient communities. It also needs to encourage active participation of the communities themselves in shaping their own future.

We support a more planned approach to securing higher densities, which also secures the benefits of such growth for the local community and is of a scale and type with which the local community can feel comfortable. Good growth needs to be embraced as a “win-win” for London’s neighbourhoods. ■