

Good Growth for London's historic environment

With the publication of a new draft London Plan built around the concept of 'Good Growth', Historic England are setting out the key role that heritage can and should play in shaping London's future growth, writes David English

Our recently published report *Translating Good Growth for London's Historic Environment* makes the compelling case that the active management of London's historic environment is fundamental to good growth. It also argues that in order for the concept of good growth, and the new London Plan, to align with the NPPF's principles of sustainable development, heritage needs to be seen as a strength and cross-cutting policy priority.

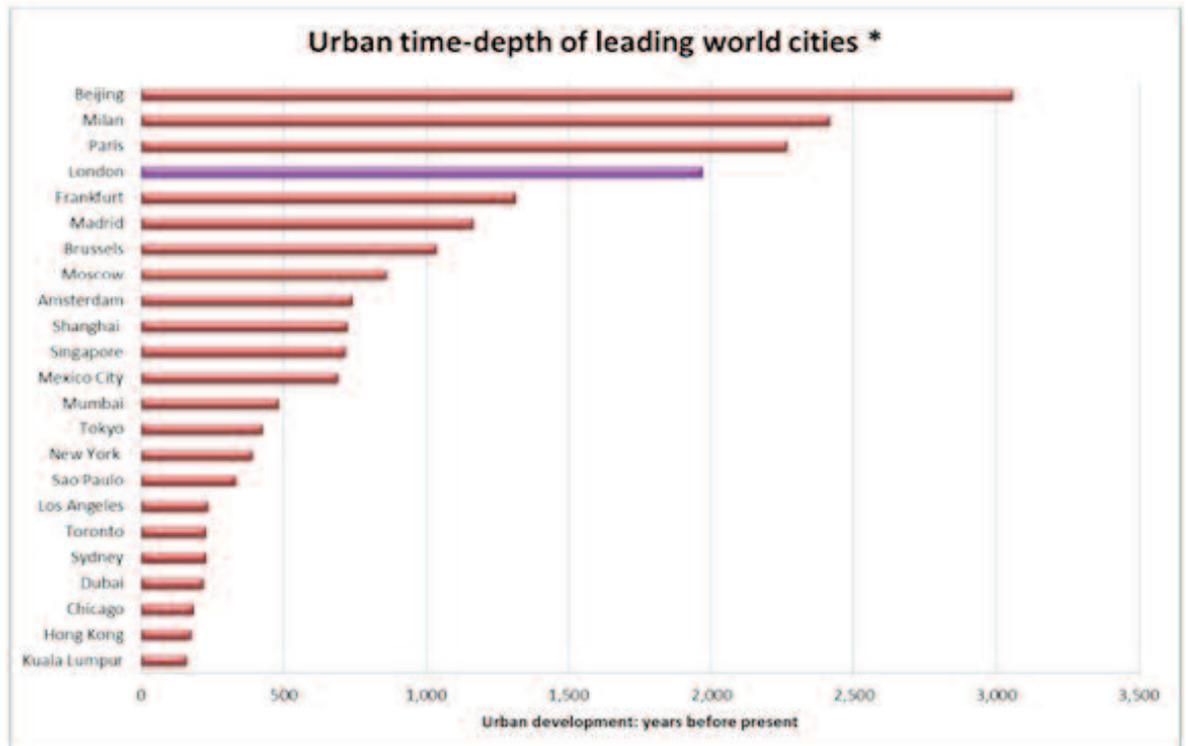
Our report celebrates a small selection of London's many heritage success stories. These illustrate how heritage-led regeneration is at the heart of good growth and promote the public value of the historic environment. Given the breadth and diversity of London's heritage, Historic England strongly advocates that the new London Plan should actively embrace the opportunities heritage presents. This will ensure that Londoners get the best type of growth, which retains and reinforces what makes the city unique and so special to them and people from around the world.

Historic England commissioned ARUP to produce our good growth report following the release of the Mayor's *A City for All Londoners* (2016), which we responded to with our Keep it London publication. Keep it London drew on a series of background evidence reports that explored the effectiveness of the

existing London Plan heritage policies, characterisation and the relationship between historic character and density that we produced as an aid to the Mayor and others interested in London's future. Among its recommendations was the need for Historic England to help frame the strategic debate around London's future growth, due to the great value of heritage to Londoners.

The concept of good growth is in *A City for All Londoners*, and previously had been a key theme in the series of reports produced by the Mayor's Design Advisory Group (MDAG). However, despite good growth being described as a series of principles, no clear definition was provided. Likewise, while MDAG had considered the idea of 'London-ness' and the need to reinforce distinctive local character, they too had not engaged with the growth opportunities that heritage creates. This lack of clarity provided us with an opportunity to enter and add value to the public debate, which has since expanded with the Mayor's Good Growth by Design programme.

So how does heritage contribute to good growth? Drawing on the themes set out by MDAG and the Mayor, the report focused on three areas where heritage makes a particular contribution to good growth. These are the role that heritage plays:



* World cities rated alpha, alpha + and alpha ++ by the Globalization and World Cities (GaWC) Research Network (2012) <http://www.lboro.ac.uk/gawc/index.html>



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LEFT: Interior of Fitzrovia Chapel

- in defining London's character and Londoners' identity;
- as an inherent part of successful change; and,
- by adding value to the development process.

Camden Town, Covent Garden, Brixton, Green Lanes, Chelsea, Bethnal Green... the list of London's diverse neighbourhoods known the world over, is as long as it is rich. Similarly, with four UNESCO World Heritage Sites, and landmarks like St Paul's Cathedral, London is home to internationally significant buildings and places that help define the identity of our city and its residents. This heritage underpins 'London-ness'; what makes our city unique and special. The fundamental contribution that heritage makes to the identity of places, and the value that this creates, is visible in the way that the U+I are developing the Old Vinyl Factory in Hayes. By embracing the industrial heritage of the former EMI factory on the site, the developer has created a distinctive brand that is drawing in new businesses, residents and students to the area.

Similarly in Westminster, the redevelopment of the Middlesex Hospital maintained and reinforced heritage significance, while delivering almost three hundred new homes and much needed office space. By retaining and celebrating both listed buildings and characterful unlisted buildings, and by carefully relating the new buildings to the historic street layout, the development has added to Fitzrovia's sense of place. The restoration of the Grade II* listed chapel at the heart of the site, a space of great beauty, highly significant to former patients, their families and medical staff, preserves and enhances a unique link to the site's previous use and its special significance in many peoples' personal histories.

The case studies all illustrate how investing in heritage delivers dividends. This value is economic and social, creating homes and supporting jobs, as well as renewing the beautiful, charming and interesting places and buildings that define London. The redevelopment of the markets in Kingston and

Greenwich town centres, with new public realm and sensitive adaption of historic buildings, illustrate how good growth can deliver benefits in the most sensitive places. Now in huge demand by visitors and retailers, these markets are bringing life to the town centres and supporting large numbers of small businesses. The revitalised civic sporting facilities in Poplar, illustrate how heritage can support improved well-being and better quality of life for London's local communities, as well as delivering affordable housing.

Actively managing London's historic environment enables it to act as a catalyst for growth. There are things that heritage offers people that nothing else can, by changing the way that they look at things, places and themselves. The hugely successful redevelopment of Bankside Power Station illustrates the ability of heritage to amplify the interest of schemes for the public. Despite not being statutorily listed the sensitive approach to the transformation of the power station into a gallery, and its recently completed extension, have supported the wider regeneration of Bankside and made Tate Modern an attraction of choice for 6.4m visitors in 2014.

At the other end of the scale, the imaginative adaption of the Thrale Almshouses in Lambeth created 17 new and refurbished homes at affordable prices for women over the age of 60. As well as providing specialist housing that will contribute to meeting the needs of London's aging population, the sensitive design increased the sense of security and was of such quality that a nearby conservation area was expanded to include the development. This virtuous circle, creating value by drawing on what is special about existing buildings when considering adaptations, puts heritage at the centre of the development process. All fifteen case studies illustrate how London's architects, planners and designers successfully do this time and again, creatively conserving existing buildings and places, retaining what makes them special and adapting them to fit >>>



RIGHT: Poplar Baths/Greenwich

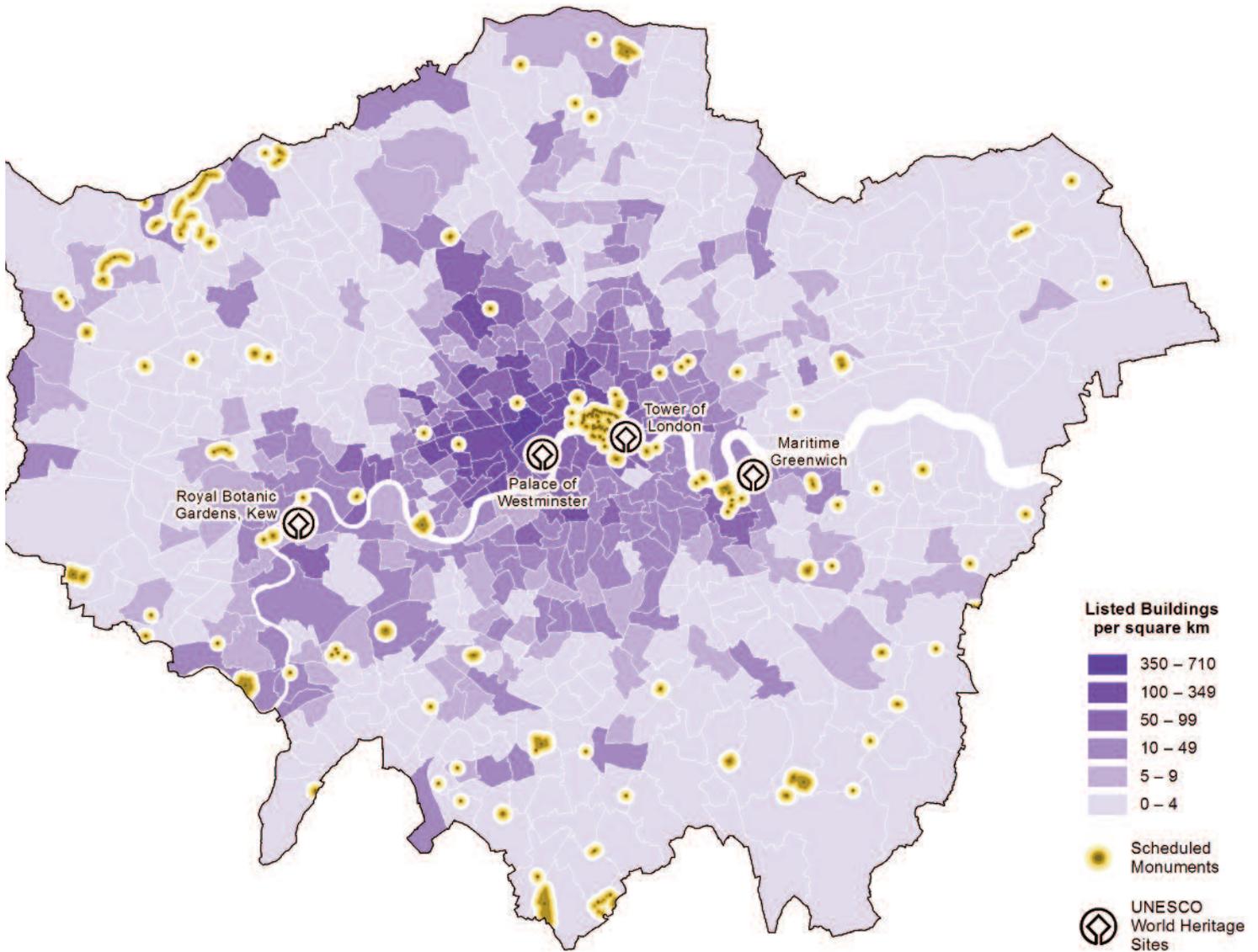
>>> for purpose for the future.

Given the challenge posed by a rapidly expanding population and a finite supply of land, Historic England is keen to support the Mayor, the boroughs, developers, residents and all other stakeholders with an interest in London, to get the best

out of what we already have. While some types of development may bring risks to heritage, we believe the need to renew and densify parts of the city creates opportunities. These are both to enhance all parts of London's built environment, and also to engage with Londoners to identify the areas,

RIGHT BELOW:
Thrale Almshouses
(Photo cred Robert
Greshoff)





buildings, views, monuments etc. that matter to them.

Developing strong policies which promote the conservation and enjoyment of London’s heritage in the new London Plan will go a long way to ensuring that London has a positive heritage strategy. We therefore welcome Mayor’s direction of travel paper, and the positive messages about plan-led development, based on evidence, coming out of City Hall. Our good growth report is one of a series of research papers that Historic England has produced to support the new London Plan and a heritage strategy for London. Other research reports illustrate the public value of London’s archaeology, and the benefits, eco-

nom ic and social, of investing in Heritage at Risk. This work, along with our other data sets, archive resources and in-house experts, will inform the advice we will be providing on the different Mayoral strategies over the coming months. ■

For more information on any of the above research (and our responses to consultations), and to access our report on good growth, please visit our website www.historicengland.org.uk

For more information on Keep it London, Good Growth, and any of the other Historic England reports referenced above, please visit the Keep it London page of our website.