

Putting the partnership back into PPP

We need to restore faith in the private and public sectors working together for the common good says Matthew Weiner

Last year, we saw the launch of the Mayor of London's new London Development Panel (LDP). An important step in a city where there is a great need for new homes, offices and workspaces, but where land often remains frustratingly difficult to develop. The Panel, of which we are a member, is expected to help bring forward up to £20bn worth of development land over the next four years, presenting an exciting opportunity to unlock untapped potential in public land across the capital. It's also an opportunity to demonstrate the power of partnership.

The LDP will create a network of developers, housing associations and contractors with whom public bodies can work to accelerate the development of public land. It's a great opportunity to use our expertise gained on our PPP projects to regenerate even more communities across London.

PPP is our specialism for a reason. We've long known that holistic and transparent public-private collaborations are the answer to the challenge of making more productive use of the public land our country owns. There's also a major financial imperative: local authorities have less money to spend, meaning working with private sector partners is essential if we are to deliver the development we all want and need.

But if projects like these – and the sites the LDP will bring forward for development – are to be a success, we need to rebuild trust in the spirit of PPP.

In recent years, that term has been tarnished, open to misinterpretation and misuse. Often it's been confused with

Private Finance Initiatives (PFI) which have now abolished following high profile failures such as the collapse of Carillion. Yet here is much that is good about the private and public sector working together for the benefit of all – which is why we want to restore faith in that for the benefit of London and the UK more widely.

That starts with listening. As a developer specialising in mixed-use and regeneration schemes, we bring a lot of knowledge and expertise to our partnerships. But we don't know everything. So it's important to work with our partners to find areas of common interest and start our plans from there. Only then can we understand what makes a place unique and bring out the richness of its heritage while also creating spaces for the future.

And just as we think it's important to listen to our partners, we also think it's important to listen to others in our industry – and beyond. That's why in November, we launched the findings of our consultation, PPP: The Reset.

Through a series of roundtable discussions and stakeholder interviews, we spoke to representatives from the public, private and civic sectors to find out what is and what isn't working when it comes to the delivery of PPP. The consultation helped us distil what lies at the heart of great PPP and suggest a way forward to ensure these characteristics remain at the centre of future developments.

What all those involved concluded is that good PPP is ultimately a genuine partnership between equals, where public and private sector are united by a shared vision and purpose. It's also

focused on the community, authentically engaging with local voices to create something which truly responds to what local people want and need.

We want to ensure this remains the reality for the developments we create, so we have made a series of business commitments to hold ourselves to account in how we deliver our PPP schemes. This includes establishing an independent community challenge panel which will bring together representatives from the public sector, civic society and other developers and the appointment of a new Non-Executive Director to oversee it. On certain schemes, we'll also share any profit we make above an agreed projected return with our public partner and the local community directly via a Community Profit Share Arrangement.

Why have we made these commitments? Because we want to keep using PPP to create great places. Homes, yes, but also community assets, student beds, libraries, retail, leisure, work and enterprise spaces: places where people live, work and play. Take our site at 8 Albert Embankment, where we'll be delivering a new fire station at no cost to the public purse, or our Central Research Laboratory at The Old Vinyl Factory in Hayes, South West London, the UK's first purpose-built hardware accelerator space.

Building complex mixed-use sites like this at the heart of our cities doesn't happen without partnership. That's why we're determined to do our part in helping to create the right conditions for the public sector to continue to work closely with us to develop unique places where communities across the UK can thrive. ■



Matthew Weiner is CEO of developer U+I

