

Building a Better London

Boris Johnson

Building a Better London

London is one of the most desirable places to live in the country, offering better job prospects and cultural amenities than anywhere else in the UK. But the price of these benefits is a rising cost of living that is reducing Londoners' quality of life.

The single biggest effect on this is the cost of housing. House prices in London have accelerated faster than wages over the last eight years, and many Londoners now cannot afford to buy a home in their own city.

Those lucky enough to own their home have to work longer hours to meet ever-rising mortgage costs, and those still searching have to take on mountains of debt in order to get on the ladder.

After eight years under Labour's Ken Livingstone, housing waiting lists in some areas have almost tripled, while fewer affordable homes are being built and the quality of developments has declined. The number of first-time buyers in the city has almost halved.

We urgently need fresh thinking to get more homes built and to give a helping hand to those who want to own their own home.

We need a fresh approach to help low-income Londoners move off waiting lists and into homes that are affordable and high quality.

We need a new era of cooperation between London's Mayor and the borough councils, to forge the best solutions for local communities.

We must embrace fresh ideas and break with the tired approach of the past.

My vision is a London where the quality of what we build is as important as the quantity; a place where young families can afford a home of their own; a city where we value and protect open green spaces and historic views.

If elected, I will enact the following measures;

My Pledges

I will:

1. Help More Londoners Afford Their Own Home

- Release GLA-owned land and £130 million from the Regional Housing Pot to launch a new 'FirstSteps Housing Scheme', which will be open to first-time buyers frozen out of Government schemes
- Work with the boroughs to build 50,000 more affordable homes by 2011
- Invest £60 million from the Regional Housing Pot to start renovating the capital's 84,205 empty properties to help low-income Londoners off waiting lists
- Incentivise the boroughs to release dormant housing to those stuck in bed and breakfast accommodation, by returning the Mayor's precept to them
- Work with local councils to deliver more family-sized homes
- Increase shared ownership schemes for low-income families by a third
- Protect private tenants from unscrupulous landlords by publishing an online 'Fair Rents Guide'
- Explore the possibility of a tenant deposit scheme with a guaranteed arbitration period of one month

2. Design Developments To Combat Crime

- Amend the London Plan to attach more importance to designing out crime, without compromising the aesthetic quality of developments

3. Protect Green Spaces and Historic Views

- Reinstate planning rules that protect the views of St Paul's Cathedral and the Palace of Westminster and reinforce protection around new viewing corridors
- Toughen up the London Plan to prevent development on domestic gardens and use planning agreements to protect small shops
- Encourage builders to build more environmentally-friendly homes in the private sector and encourage boroughs to adopt the 'Merton Rule' for on-site renewable energy
- Protect the green belt by using the Mayor's powers to refuse applications to build on it

What We Need To Do:

A huge number of Londoners are finding it difficult to get on the housing ladder. There are the low-income Londoners who are stuck on housing waiting lists, wanting to be housed in affordable, desirable, permanent homes, and there are middle-income Londoners on good wages for whom the prospect of home ownership is still a distant dream.

If we are to improve the quality of life for all Londoners then we must do something about the impact housing has on the rising cost of living.

I will **help first-time buyers** who are frozen out of existing Government schemes by releasing surplus land from the GLA estate for new housing. The homes will be used to form the new 'FirstSteps Housing Scheme'. These homes will be guaranteed to be at least 20% cheaper than similar types of housing in the local area, and will be financed by a £130 million surplus from the Regional Housing Pot.

Londoners who cannot afford to own their home will be able to purchase a share of the property, and be able to build up, over time, a bigger stake to help them subsequently purchase on the open market.

I will raise the income level required for 'FirstSteps' eligibility above that set by Government schemes, to reflect the unique situation in London, where the cost of housing has outpaced average wages.

New schemes should be operated by not-for-profit housing cooperatives, allowing residents a greater say over their area. These are proven to build stronger communities, reduce crime, and improve quality of life.

I will **help low-income Londoners on housing waiting lists** by returning long-term empty homes to the housing stock. I will achieve this by allocating a £60 million surplus from the 'Decent Homes' programme to renovate empty homes in the private sector, for the express purpose of housing those on waiting lists. At present, it is estimated there are some 84,000 empty homes in total across London that could be brought into use. I will also incentivise councils by giving them the Mayor's share of Council Tax on the 10,000 dormant properties that London's councils own, on the condition that they are reoccupied by a family on the housing waiting list for that area – in particular those stuck in bed and breakfast accommodation.

We need to take a **fresh approach to affordable housing**. I will work closely with local councils to deliver the 50,000 new units that London needs by 2011. The out-of-date adversarial approach of Ken Livingstone has failed to deliver the housing that London needs. His rigid and cosmetic targets have, more often than not, stifled development and suppressed the growth of affordable housing.

Affordable housing must be more than 'decent'; it must be desirable. I will encourage developers to work with housing associations at the design stage to **improve the aesthetic quality of new developments**.

I am interested in **outcomes, not processes**. Often councils that focus on increasing the number of affordable units – instead of limiting themselves to the Labour Mayor's rigid target – actually deliver more affordable homes. I will remove the 50% target and replace it with a system whereby the Mayor agrees a yearly unit target with each borough, with the aim of increasing their output year on year.

London needs **more family-sized homes**. I will amend the London Plan to include a strong steer in favour of building affordable, family-sized units.

We must **extend opportunities for home ownership** to as many Londoners as possible. I believe that shared ownership schemes provide the best opportunity for this. They allow first-time buyers to purchase affordable shares that can increase as their circumstances improve. Therefore, I will amend the London Plan to increase the number of shared ownership units in London by a third.

I want to help the private tenants who live in London. I will **launch a 'Fair Rents Guide' on the Mayor's website** to help Londoners determine whether or not they are getting a fair deal.

And as London continues to grow, we must think very carefully about the new communities we create with housing developments. I will make **designing out crime** a priority, and will amend the London Plan and the Mayor's Housing Strategy accordingly. Poorly-lit streets, cramped conditions, inadequate transport connections and even straightforward ugliness are the enemies of safety, and all of them help crime to flourish.

I will **protect historic views of London landmarks**. Ken Livingstone has introduced regulations that put views of St Paul's and the Palace of Westminster at risk. I will amend the London Plan to reinstate the original protection of ten historic views of these landmarks, and strengthen protection for three new views: from St James's Park towards Horse Guards Road; the bridge over the Serpentine in Hyde Park to Westminster; and Island Gardens, Isle of Dogs to the Royal Naval College. I believe well-designed tall buildings should play a part in London's development, but they must not overshadow existing landmarks.

We need to **protect London's gardens**. Last year alone, more than a thousand gardens were concreted over in the capital. London was once known as a garden city, but our private green spaces are fast being eroded. Ken Livingstone's London Plan has failed to protect London's gardens from development, and I will **stop the garden grab** by working with boroughs to strengthen the rules against such development. This will help ensure new housing is built where appropriate, and public spaces are protected.

I will protect London's green belt, and help **regenerate the suburbs** by publishing a separate strategy, to complement the London Plan, on how to encourage sustainable economic growth in outer London. I will engage a group of leading businesspeople, entrepreneurs and councillors in the outer London boroughs to draw up the proposals. I will also help **protect the high street** by securing affordable retail units for small, independent shops.

I want to end the top-down targets and diktats that are imposed on the boroughs. I will adopt a fresh approach to housing in London to build varied and vibrant communities, not just tick boxes. The current London Plan was designed for the housing market of yesterday. Today's challenges demand fresh thinking. If elected as Mayor I will be committed to working in partnership with the boroughs to build a better London – and to leave a lasting legacy for future generations of Londoners.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Boris Johnson', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Boris Johnson

Conservative Candidate for London Mayor

1. Helping More Londoners To Afford Their Own Home

I will:

- **Help people who do not qualify for Government intermediate housing schemes to benefit from a new 'FirstSteps Housing Scheme', offering quality homes 20% below the local market rate, built on non-essential Brownfield land released by the GLA estate.**
- **Work closely with borough councils to deliver 50,000 new affordable homes by 2011, replacing the 50:50 split with a unit target agreed with each borough council.**
- **Amend the London Plan to increase the building of affordable family-sized homes.**
- **Increase the number of intermediate homes by a third in London, helping more low-income and key sector workers into home ownership.**
- **Facilitate a comprehensive audit of all London's empty and 'hidden homes' to increase the social housing stock.**
- **Provide a further £60 million for the regeneration of empty homes on the condition they are let to Londoners in social housing need.**
- **Return the Mayor's Council Tax precept to borough councils transferring their dormant stock to short life housing providers, to help relieve homelessness.**
- **Publish an online 'Fair Rents Guide' for London.**
- **Amend the London Plan to encourage boroughs to work together towards the delivery of the Thames Gateway.**
- **Make design quality central to the Housing Strategy, and call on developers to consult with housing associations at the planning stage of affordable housing developments.**

Unaffordable Housing

Getting on the housing ladder poses great problems for Londoners.

There is an affordability gap in London. Couples can realistically only purchase on the open market if their combined income is around £86,500.¹ Metropolitan Home Ownership estimate that the average house price in London is thirteen times the average salary.² The threshold for accessing intermediate schemes is £52,500 (or £60,000 for key sector workers), yet the average salary in London is £30,212 –

¹ This is based on a conventional mortgage three times the buyer's salary on a property of £288,615, the estimate by the Halifax of the average price paid by first-time buyers in London last year. We have also deducted the 10% paid as a deposit.

² MHO, London Affordable Homes show press release, September 2007.

meaning that a couple earning the average salary (making a combined income of £60,424) is disqualified from Government intermediate schemes.³

Demand For Starter Homes

Under Ken Livingstone, London now has 40% fewer first-time buyers than it did five years ago.⁴ This decline is being caused by property prices in the capital rising by 54% since 2002, while average wages lag well behind.⁵

We want to actively help first-time buyers by releasing non-essential Brownfield land held by the GLA estate for lower cost housing development. The way in which the estate is disposed of, and the accessibility of new homes built on it, will help those Londoners who are unable to access either the open market or intermediate housing schemes.

The crisis in first-time buying affects the whole of London. Today, buying in 30 of London's 32 boroughs is out of the reach of the average first-time buyer, compared with just 12 boroughs five years ago.⁶ The only two boroughs in London now within the reach of the average first-time buyer are Newham and Barking and Dagenham.⁷

We recognise that the central problem is raising sufficient capital to purchase on the open market. The average price paid by a first-time buyer in London rose by 15% last year to £289,167 – up from £187,693 in 2002.⁸ The average deposit paid by first-time buyers in London this year was £61,964, up 49% since 2002.⁹ The average first-time buyer in the capital paid £8,675 in stamp duty (at the 3% rate) compared with the UK average of £1,751 (at 1%).¹⁰ None of this is helped by the fact that City Hall now takes £311.25 in Council Tax on a Band D property – more than twice as much as in 2001.¹¹

To help struggling first-time buyers, we intend to pilot a relatively new form of housing for the UK – Below Market Rate (BMR) homes, which are guaranteed to be priced at least 20% below the local market price and will be built on surplus Brownfield land on the GLA estate. This new scheme will be called 'FirstSteps Housing Scheme'.

³ Office of National Statistics, Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, 7 November 2007.

⁴ 5th First-time buyer Review, Halifax, 22 December 2007.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Full list of towns FTB, Halifax, 22 December 2007.

⁷ Table 5, percentage of First-time buyers by Type of Property, 22 December 2007.

⁸ This is based on figures released on 10 March 2008 by Halifax on UK stamp duty charges for the start of this year. 2002 house prices are taken from table 7, Average House Price – First-time buyer Affordability by Post Town, 22 December 2007.

⁹ Table 6, First-time buyer Deposit by Region, Halifax, 22 December 2007.

¹⁰ This is based on figures released on 10 March 2008 by Halifax on UK stamp duty charges for the start of this year.

¹¹ Mayor of London Budget, 2008/9 and Mayor of London Budget, 2001/2.

Helping Those The London Plan Forgot

We cannot set thresholds for qualification for Government intermediate housing, but we can set thresholds for qualification for new developments on the GLA estate. The Government's intermediate housing thresholds may be appropriate for the rest of the UK, but do not suit London's unique circumstances.

'FirstSteps' homes will be aimed at Londoners on low to middle incomes, who currently receive practically no help to get on the housing ladder. These homes will be open to all Londoners paying the basic rate of income tax, which means earning up to £34,600.¹²

In particular, this will assist couples currently frozen out of Government intermediate housing schemes. For instance, a two-income household in which both are earning over £26,250 but still pay the basic rate of income tax would not qualify for a Government scheme – but would for 'FirstSteps', because our scheme raises the threshold by £16,700.

'FirstSteps Housing Scheme' homes will be in addition to the 50,000 new affordable homes already planned for London by 2011.

We recognise that low-income Londoners desperately need help to get on the housing ladder. But we should not ignore middle-income Londoners who are unable to buy on the open market. Recent press reports suggest that Ken Livingstone is promoting a scheme capped for two-income households at £35,000.¹³ This will lock out thousands of Londoners and is half the cap we are proposing for this scheme.

There are precedents for a more flexible approach on qualifying for intermediate housing. For example, the Government of Ireland's 1999 Affordable Homes Scheme provides for the building of new homes on land owned or purchased by a local authority. It targets people with low to middle incomes and is primarily aimed at first-time buyers.¹⁴

By releasing 'FirstSteps Housing Scheme' homes to people on moderate incomes, we would help a new generation of people onto the housing ladder. Evidence suggests that around 74% of people in discount homes build up enough capital to make their next purchase on the local open market.¹⁵

¹² H.M. Revenue and Customs set the basic rate of income tax at £34,600 in 2007/8.

¹³ Ken: Get Crossrail right or it could ruin London, Evening Standard, 27 February 2008.

¹⁴ The Government of Ireland sets eligibility for a two-income household at the combined values of 2.5 times the larger salary plus the smaller salary below €100,000.

¹⁵ Burlington CLT, Permanently Affordable Home Ownership, May 2003.

How 'FirstSteps Housing Scheme' Works

By releasing GLA land, 'FirstSteps' shared ownership homes will be guaranteed at least 20% below the average local market price in London. This means that, based on prices paid by first-time buyers last year, these homes would be over £50,000 more affordable.

The experience of Ireland is relevant to London. Since 2002, the Dublin Government's Affordable Housing Initiative has provided homes of the same design and quality standards as private market builds in the locality, but sold at least 20% below the local market price.¹⁶ Homes under the Affordable Housing Initiative are built on local authority or state land, with the initial assessment that 10,000 additional units can be provided across 70 sites.¹⁷

Below Market Rate (BMR) homes are central to delivering homes in the United States. Both the Mayors of San Francisco and California offer BMR homes to help people into the open market.¹⁸ Following the San Francisco model in particular, we will ensure new BMR homes under the 'FirstSteps' scheme on the released GLA estate will be available to households meeting specific income and first-time homeowner requirements. In addition to earning at the basic rate of income tax, neither individual should previously have been a home owner. If none of the leaseholders pay the basic rate of income tax after occupation, the unit must be re-sold within 12 months. Homes purchased through the 'FirstSteps Housing Scheme' will be subject to resale restrictions to ensure they can be resold only at a below-market-rate price to eligible Londoners who are unable to get onto the housing ladder.

Identifying Development Land

The GLA estate is extensive. Both Transport for London (TfL) and the London Development Agency (LDA) own land that has either been developed for housing; or is non-essential land that could be used for new build.

The TfL Property Development Strategy team have identified surplus land on which some 7,000 residential homes could be built. We understand that no planning applications have been granted. The majority of the available units would be built at Hammersmith and Fulham (3,500 units), Kensington and Chelsea (913 units), and Hillingdon (610 units).¹⁹

¹⁶ Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Affordable Housing Partnership report, Government of Ireland, 2007.

¹⁷ Sustaining Progress, Third Social Partnership report, June 2005.

¹⁸ Government of San Francisco, Mayor's Office of Housing, Affordable Homes Factsheet, 2007.

¹⁹ MQTs number 225/2008: Housing Land.

The LDA owns 318 hectare of surplus land suitable for residential development, which they estimate would provide 32,000 new homes.²⁰ However, some of this land has already had planning permission granted. We would not seek to obstruct successful and current planning applications, but will seek to release the remaining land for the 'FirstSteps' scheme.

We will not seek to release land held by either the Metropolitan Police Authority or the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority.

Cost-effective Land Release

We will release land held by the GLA under new cost-effective measures. Under Circular 06/03 on the General Disposal Consent (England) 2003, land can now be transferred to local community organisations, without incurring penalties from H.M. Treasury.²¹

There are precedents for transferring public land for housing development under the General Disposal Consent. Brent Borough Council released the freehold land on the Chalk Hill Estate in Wembley to the Metropolitan Housing Trust. Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council disposed of the freehold of undeveloped land at Foxdown, in Hampshire, to Westbury Homes Ltd.²²

Community Land Trusts And Housing Cooperatives

We propose to sell the land to Community Land Trusts (CLTs). CLTs are non-profit, tax-exempt, and open to all members of the local community, and are democratically owned and controlled by key stakeholders.

By releasing the land to a CLT, we ensure that the units built on it remain affordable for future generations. This ensures 'FirstSteps' homes can remain below market price. The principle of transferring land to a CLT is already happening in the UK, but on a very small scale. A recent example was the transfer of land by the local authority to a CLT in Oldham, which was subsequently developed for residential housing.²³

CLTs do not usually manage housing units themselves. This would normally be done through a mutual housing organisation (a cooperative), which can either lease the land or become a shareholder in the CLT. Housing cooperatives are already operating in London, and they would be open to work on this initiative. Cooperatives are similar to Registered Social Landlords (RSL), but operated, in effect, as a charity

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ This Circular gives the GLA general consent to release land for less than the best consideration that can reasonably be obtained where it promotes the economic, social or environmental well-being. The difference between the unrestricted value of the land to be disposed of and the consideration for the disposal must not exceed £2 million.

²² Housing and Regeneration Bill, Committee Stage, Hansard, 17 January 2008.

²³ Oldham Rochdale Pathfinder, Annual Market Renewal Annual Report, 2005.

with a greater say for residents. We want to accelerate housing supply to cooperatives because they help build stronger communities.

There are a number of financial advantages for tenants of cooperative housing. The cooperative raises the finance and takes the financial risk. It also pools costs. By acting like a building society, people can get preferential finance. The cooperative will also be responsible for the initial sale of the homes, and then the re-sale, when householders leave the scheme. Occupants have the option of staircasing (buying additional shares in the property over time), as in an intermediate scheme – but unlike a Government shared equity scheme, they can staircase down as well as up, depending on their financial circumstances. Indeed, BMR is even more secure as the property is below market value on entry and exit. This also ensures the value is captured, together with the land, for future generations.

Mutual co-ownership of housing is part of mainstream housing policy in the United States, Canada, Norway and Denmark. In Norway 14% of stock is managed by cooperatives, but less than 1% of housing is cooperatively managed in the UK.²⁴ The 2007 Quirk Report, chaired by the Chief Executive of Lewisham Borough Council, recommended to the Government accelerating the transfer of public assets to community organisations, including CLTs.²⁵ We agree and would implement this key recommendation.

Some of the funds raised through land release would be available to the cooperative for start-up costs. In practice, cooperatives become self-financing after initial capital start-up. As with existing cooperatives in the UK, the board of the cooperative would be responsible for raising finance, and any potential bidders for funds would be subject to a rigorous due diligence by the GLA, and expected to be registered with the Financial Services Authority. This was one of the recommendations made by Birmingham City Council following a feasibility study for how the cooperative-CLTs model might operate in an inner-city environment.²⁶

The remaining funds raised would be invested into community projects. The real benefit of cooperatives is the participation of the occupants, who become members, and the ability to create sustainable neighbourhoods, delivering value for money and reducing anti-social behaviour.

Investing The Regional Housing Pot

Cooperatives will be able to access social housing grants to build affordable units, as currently happens. This would require no new allocation of funds within the Regional

²⁴ Submission by the UK Cooperative Council to the Cooperative Commission, May 2000.

²⁵ Department for Communities and Local Government, Quirk Report: Making assets work, May 2007.

²⁶ Confederation of Cooperative Housing, Stock Transfer – the community gateway model, 2002.

Housing Pot 2008-11. The £3.97 billion grant²⁷ for London is £130 million higher than the GLA expected when it budgeted the delivery of 50,000 new affordable homes.²⁸ Ken Livingstone has simply added the surplus to his original costing, without specifying where or how it will be spent.²⁹ Under our proposal, we would match the original costing to deliver 50,000 affordable homes by 2011, with the £130 million surplus being made available to cooperatives. 'FirstSteps' is another form of affordable housing so will qualify for housing grant. Cooperatives will also have the freedom to bid for funds from the private sector.

This use of the Regional Housing Pot is, potentially, able to offer good value for taxpayers' money. In the largest cooperative in the United States, Burlington CLT, the public subsidies invested in making the homes affordable not only remained in the houses at resale, but also increased in value, from \$1,525,148 to \$2,099,590.³⁰

To ensure the accelerated delivery of this new housing, we will use the new powers under the GLA Act 2007 to allow the Mayor to directly negotiate planning applications with developers.

Building Strong Communities

CLTs and cooperatives will help us build a better London.³¹ There is understandable concern that new housing built in London does not create the problem estates of tomorrow, but we believe the way to build strong communities is to trust local people to shape their own environment. The clearest demonstration of trust is through the CLT-cooperative initiative, where members are able to exercise control over their rents and service charges, ensuring value for money and directing surpluses to improving their housing environment. It is clear that CLTs and greater community engagement reduce crime, the fear of crime, and anti-social behaviour.

For example, the Avedore Stationsby estate in Denmark has been transformed from a problem estate in the 1970s to a thriving place which now has the lowest crime rate in Greater Copenhagen.³² In the UK, a Government investigation found a housing estate run by tenants in Birmingham was one of only two places in the city where fear of crime had dropped.³³ It also found that community management in a

²⁷ Department for Communities and Local Government, press release on 2008-11 regional housing pot allocations, 12 December 2007.

²⁸ Table 4: Regional Housing Pot 2008-2011, GLA Draft Housing Strategy 2007, page 156.

²⁹ Letter to the Chair of London Assembly from the Mayor of London, 18 December 2007.

³⁰ Burlington CLT, Permanently Affordable Home Ownership, May 2003.

³¹ Cooperatives are cost-effective, and produce better results for residents. An evaluation by PriceWaterHouse Coopers demonstrated that tenant management organisations are able to produce significant and worthwhile benefit and superior value for money. In 2006, Oxford Brookes University found that tenant management organisations (or TMO, another form of cooperative) in the UK were equal or surpassed the top 25% of local authorities in England in terms of repairs, lettings, rent collection and tenant participation. It concluded that improvements in the area's appearance and to the quality of life of residents were some of the main achievements creditable to the TMO. DCLG/Oxford Brookes University, 174: Tenant Management: evidence of TMOs in England, May 2006.

³² Report of the Policy Action Team 5 on housing management, Cabinet Office, 2006.

³³ Department for Communities and Local Government, Strong and Prosperous Communities, page 40.

neighbourhood in Newcastle had led to crime falling by 45% in the first six months of 2006 compared to the same time period in 2003.³⁴

We firmly believe therefore that creating a network of CLTs across London is not only the most creative and transparent use of public assets owned by the GLA. It is also the clearest example yet of devolving planning power to communities, and is one of the best routes to creating sustainable neighbourhoods, delivering value for money and reducing anti-social behaviour.

Improving Access To The Open Market

We would expect homeowners in London benefiting from the BMR scheme to subsequently purchase on the open market. This is achievable. Within six months of re-selling and leaving the Burlington CLT, 74% of former CLT homeowners were able to purchase their next home on the open market because the equity in their home increased.³⁵

Extending The 'FirstSteps' Scheme

We will ask the Audit Commission to undertake a full appraisal of the 'FirstSteps Housing Scheme' to prove its effectiveness within the first term of our administration. With that evidence, we will encourage the release of other non-essential Brownfield land suitable for residential development held by other public bodies in London to the 'FirstSteps' scheme. The London Development Agency would be in a strong position to help facilitate the transfer of this land, having gained experience on the Olympic development.³⁶

Empty GLA Properties

It is unacceptable that, in spite of waiting lists increasing by 68%, houses owned by the GLA estate are empty. TfL own around 79 units on the North Circular Road, N11, which are empty and have become havens of crime and anti-social behaviour.³⁷ This is a missed opportunity at a time of great need.

We will work to get homes like these occupied, even if on a short-term basis, at a 'FirstSteps' rate.

³⁴ Ibid, page 38.

³⁵ The affordability of the homes improved over time, with an average home affordable to a household earning 62% of Area Median Income (AMI) on the initial sale becoming affordable to those earning 57% of AMI on resale. This allows the wealth to be shared between the CLT, and help people build wealth themselves through a return on their initial investment.

³⁶ English Partnership holds a list of surplus public land within Greater London. Details for 2007 shows that most is held by the British Railways Board and the Ministry of Defence also owns a sizeable proportion of land at Hillingdon.

³⁷ In the 1970s land was compulsorily purchased to widen the road, but this never happened. Ownership has now transferred from the Department of Transport to TfL. TfL estimates that it owns approximately 265 units, and has talked of disposing of the land and the units not required by the agency (TfL has estimated that it would retain only 89 units). See: Question No. 330/2008, MQTs, 20 February 2008 and http://www.emptyhomes.com/documents/publications/case/prod_northcircnov06.pdf

The agencies of the GLA already own a large number of properties. The LDA is freeholder for more than 44 hectares of land that is currently used for housing, and in total about 3,337 residential homes.³⁸ TfL owns 526 residential units in all, most of which are in Enfield, where 359 units are located.³⁹ The MPA owns 750 houses across London, including 119 in Westminster, 59 in Ealing and 47 in Greenwich.⁴⁰ London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA) owns about 25 homes.⁴¹

We will undertake a full audit of other properties held under the GLA estate, and make empty units available to housing trusts as 'FirstSteps' properties.

Delivering 50,000 Affordable Homes

London has a serious problem with housing supply. Londoners are twice as likely than the rest of Britain's population to live in 'overcrowded' accommodation,⁴² and they are almost twice as likely to need to share accommodation.⁴³ These pressures are set to increase with London's population expected to rise from 7.5 million in 2006 to 8.7 million in 2026.⁴⁴

There is no question that we need more housing. We will meet this challenge with a commitment to build 50,000 new affordable homes by 2011.

London will fail to fulfil this ambition under the current target culture that has failed to deliver the required number of affordable homes, which is why we will take a new approach to creating more homes.

Ending The Hypocrisy

The approach of setting an arbitrary 50% housing target has comprehensively failed London; the proportion of affordable housing has dropped from 40-45% between 1997-2001 to just 34% of completions last year.⁴⁵

Ken Livingstone has repeatedly attacked borough councils that do not manage to meet his 50% target, 'naming and shaming' Wandsworth and Hammersmith and Fulham for missing their targets.⁴⁶ He has specifically attacked Westminster Council, accusing it of failing to do enough in its planning to meet its affordable housing

³⁸ In Newham it owns a total of at least 24 hectares, including Royal Victoria Dock (Excel - Capital East Phase 1) Newham and Royal Victoria Dock (Excel - Westgate) Newham³⁸; Furlong Development (Albert Basin) Newham 8 hectares; and Britannia Village Newham 16 hectares. In Greenwich it owns Royal Arsenal Greenwich consisting of 20 hectares. Question Nos. 443 and 444/2008, MQTs, 20 February 2008.

³⁹ Question No. 444/2008, MQTs, 20 February 2008.

⁴⁰ Question No. 444/2008, MQTs, 20 February 2008.

⁴¹ Question No. 444/2008, MQTs, 20 February 2008.

⁴² DCLG, Table 806, Households: overcrowding and under-occupation: by region and tenure by household size. The London average is 6.6% compared with 2.5% nationally.

⁴³ Londoners tend to be the least happy people in the Britain when it comes to their housing situation. Only 34% of Londoners report themselves "Very Satisfied" against a national average of 48% (see ONS, Focus on London, August 2007, Table 1.11, p. 14.) They are almost twice as likely as the national average to be "Very Dissatisfied" and a Londoner is around thirteen times unhappier than a Scot about their housing (see ONS, Regional Trends, Table H2: Data drawn from Survey of English Housing, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister; Scottish Household Survey, Scottish Executive. The figure for London is 6.1% against 0.5% for Scotland.)

⁴⁴ GLA Draft Housing Strategy 2007, page 23.

⁴⁵ GLA Planning and Spatial Development Committee, Unintended Outcomes, June 2007, Para 2.8.

⁴⁶ Evening Standard, 12th November 2007.

target, asserting that it “illustrates a reluctance to enforce general conformity with the London Plan, especially with regard to affordable housing targets.”⁴⁷ He has even claimed that “it would be a disaster at this point to adopt the policy of reducing the pressure for affordable new homes.”⁴⁸

Yet one reason why proportionally less affordable housing is now being built is Ken Livingstone’s hypocrisy when approving planning applications. For instance, TfL submitted a major development for planning permission, approved by the incumbent Mayor, at Victoria Station Redevelopment: 811 units, none affordable.⁴⁹

Ken Livingstone is also involved in these two developments:

- Stratford City: 5,000 homes, 30% affordable.⁵⁰
- London Development Agency proposals for 180 houses and flats to be built in Crystal Palace Park, none affordable.⁵¹

In addition, he has given planning permission for a number of major developments which do not meet his 50% target:

- Coin Street Builders’ proposals for a skyscraper with 282 flats, none affordable.⁵²
- 31 - 39 Millharbour, Tower Hamlets: 512 homes, 30% affordable.⁵³
- 1 Millharbour, Tower Hamlets: 790 homes, 23% affordable.⁵⁴
- 71 Carmen Street, Tower Hamlets: 154 homes, 35% affordable.⁵⁵
- Crown Wharf, Newham: 767 homes, 35% affordable.⁵⁶
- Newington Industrial Estate, Southwark: 178 homes, 27% affordable.⁵⁷
- Grahame Park Estate, Barnet: 2,977 homes, 36% affordable.⁵⁸
- Copland Community School, Wembley, Brent: 451 homes, 28% affordable.⁵⁹
- 397 - 411 Westferry Road, Tower Hamlets: 190 homes, 33% affordable.⁶⁰
- 22 Marsh Wall, Tower Hamlets: 691 homes, 23% affordable.⁶¹
- Three Quays, Lower Thames Street, City: 64 homes, 25% affordable.⁶²
- West Hendon Estate Regeneration, Barnet: 2,171 homes, 31% affordable.⁶³
- Wallis House, North Brentford Quarter, Hounslow: 755 dwellings, 32% affordable.⁶⁴

⁴⁷ Mayor of London, Review of GLA Powers on Planning, 2007.

⁴⁸ Morning Star, Saturday 1 December, 2007.

⁴⁹ GLA Planning Decision, Victoria Transport Interchange, 12 November 2007.

⁵⁰ GLA Planning Decision, Zone One Stratford City, 1 August 2006.

⁵¹ LDA, Crystal Palace Park – Statement SCI, 18 October 2007.

⁵² English Heritage, A Towering Mistake for the London Skyline, 2007.

⁵³ GLA Planning Decision, 3-39 Millharbour, Isle of Dogs, 25 January 2005.

⁵⁴ GLA Planning Decision, 4 Mastmaker Place and 1 Millharbour, 30 August 2006.

⁵⁵ GLA Planning Decision, 71 Carmen Street, 25 August 2005.

⁵⁶ GLA Planning Decision, Crown Wharf, 9 February 2005.

⁵⁷ GLA Planning Decision, Newington Industrial Estate, 8 June 2005.

⁵⁸ GLA Planning Decision, Grahame Park Estate, Colindale, 23 June 2004.

⁵⁹ GLA Planning Decision, Copland Community School, Wembley, 11 May 2005.

⁶⁰ GLA Planning Decision, 397-411 Westferry Road, 17 October 2006.

⁶¹ GLA Planning Decision, Arrowhead Quay, Marsh Wall, 25 May 2007.

⁶² Tower Hamlet Borough Council, Local Area Partnership Update, November 2004.

⁶³ GLA Planning Decision, West Hendon Estate Regeneration, 9 February 2006.

⁶⁴ GLA Planning Decision, Wallace House, 2006.

Ending The Target Culture

Experience shows that when a borough council moves away from the percentage target, they can end up building more affordable units. According to the latest Annual Monitoring Report for the London Plan, from 2005/6 to 2006/7, Hounslow decreased the proportion of build given to affordable housing from 63% to 44%, but increased the number of affordable homes built from 303 to 635 units.⁶⁵ Islington decreased the proportion of build given to affordable housing from 67% to 30%, but increased the number of affordable homes built from 491 to 534 units.⁶⁶ Bexley decreased the proportion of build given to affordable housing from 68% to 48%, but increased the number of affordable homes from 58 to 115 units.⁶⁷

Furthermore, when some boroughs moved towards Ken Livingstone's target they ended up building fewer affordable homes. For example, between 2005/6 to 2006/7, Richmond upon Thames increased the proportion of build given to affordable housing from 10% to 14%, but ended up building fewer homes from 91 to 32 units.⁶⁸ Kensington and Chelsea increased the proportion of build given to affordable homes from 31% to 39%, but ended up building fewer homes from 65 to 64 units.⁶⁹ Hillingdon met the same proportion of affordable homes in each year, 24%, but ended up building fewer homes from 118 to 46 units last year.⁷⁰

Lost Development Land

This approach is also leading to land being underdeveloped. Since February 2008, the 50% target has applied to developments of ten units rather than developments of 15 units – the GLA estimates that 11,000 sites are of this size.

The result is that developers are building below unit thresholds. Indeed, when Tower Hamlets trialled the threshold reduction to nine units there was a dramatic decrease in the number of planning applications for 14-unit developments – from ten in 2005 to just one last year.⁷¹ Ken Livingstone's threshold change could conceivably lead to developers applying to build nine units instead of 14 on many sites, none of which would be affordable.

We will not impose a London-wide target for the minimum size of a development on which borough councils must negotiate affordable housing – instead we will allow them the freedom to negotiate the number of affordable homes based on a case-by-case basis.

⁶⁵ Table 16, Affordable Housing Out-turn, GLA Monitoring Report Report, February 2008.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ CB Richard Ellis, Affordable housing in London, 12 December 2007.

Working With Borough Councils

It is clear from London's continuing housing crisis that the target regime has distorted priorities and that a one-size-fits-all approach is not appropriate.

Under our administration, the bullying of borough councils will stop, and there will be no imposition of the 50% target. In the original analysis undertaken to decide on affordable housing targets, it was thought that a universal 50% target for housing would be unrealistic. The 2001 Spatial Development Strategy stated:

"The analysis undertaken for this report suggests that 50% affordable housing provision is possible in nearly two thirds of the London boroughs, but there are 12 boroughs where 50% affordable housing provision is not a realistic option and a 35% affordable housing target would be more readily achievable... Affordable housing policy adopted in the SDS should have regard to the differences between boroughs and allow for local interpretation."⁷²

While Ken Livingstone has ignored this advice, we will listen and reform the capital's planning system to allow for the differing circumstances within different London boroughs.

We will move to a unit-based agreement with the borough councils so that rather than insisting that 50% of each major development be affordable housing, we agree with each council the *number* of affordable homes that need to be delivered within that borough each year.

We will expect at least 16,667 affordable homes to be built in London every year from 2008 to 2011 to deliver 50,000 new affordable homes in that time, and will amend the London Plan to reflect this.

We will negotiate a higher unit target with those boroughs with the longest waiting lists.

We believe it is pragmatic to aim resources where need is greatest. We will allow borough councils complete freedom over how they deliver on the unit agreement.

We expect Local Planning Agreements submitted to the Mayor for approval to include provisions for ensuring social mix by providing a range of units on site, in order to prevent the creation of problem estates.

Our fresh approach will deliver 50,000 new affordable homes in London without the unnecessary bureaucracy associated with the current regime.

⁷² GLA, Affordable Housing in London, Spatial Development Strategy, Technical Report One, July 2001, p. vi and vii.

Homes People Want To Live In

We believe a successful affordable housing policy is not just about the amount of units secured, it is also about meeting the particular property needs of an area; whether larger homes to get families off waiting lists or smaller units for couples. To date, the Mayor has failed to take action on the chronic shortage of some types of housing in London.

According to the latest available data, London has a shortage of 30,000 three and four bedroom affordable homes,⁷³ and there is a surplus of some 8,300 one bedroom affordable homes.⁷⁴ This suggests that in order to meet Ken Livingstone's targets, developers are building smaller affordable units, which are cheaper to build but clearly less in demand than family-sized homes.

The result is chronic overcrowding. One in ten Londoners are living in overcrowded conditions, far higher than the national average.⁷⁵ The charity Shelter has found that three quarters of respondents blamed the short supply of large affordable properties for their overcrowded conditions.⁷⁶

We will amend the London Plan to encourage boroughs to build more family homes to tackle the shortage. This will be achieved by requiring borough planning departments to include policies that pay regard to the size and social mix of developments, based on their housing needs assessments to calculate the required mix of units in their area, and to set out these requirements in their Local Development Frameworks.

Section 106 Agreements

In 2005/6, 53% of all new affordable homes in the capital were provided through section 106 agreements.⁷⁷ These are planning obligations negotiated with developers, whereby they must provide an agreed benefit to the community in order to secure permission to build.

In total, section 106 is expected to raise £1 billion for London borough councils in direct financial payments over the next ten years.⁷⁸ Sheffield University estimates that in 2003/4 direct benefits worth £112 million were delivered in the capital.⁷⁹ London Councils estimate that in the following financial year, planning obligations raised total benefits worth at least £230 million in 2005/06.⁸⁰

⁷³ GLA Greater London Housing Requirements Study, December 2004.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Housing Federation, Home Truths: London, 2007.

⁷⁶ Shelter, Full House?, 2005

⁷⁷ Housing Federation, Home Truths: London, 2007.

⁷⁸ London Assembly, Who gains? The operation of section 106 planning agreements in London, March 2008, page 9.

⁷⁹ Valuing planning obligations in England, DCLG, 31 May 2006.

⁸⁰ The London Councils estimate was based on information received from 21 boroughs.
<http://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/doc.asp?doc=21857&cat=935>

However, we are concerned that only thirteen of London's 32 borough councils have adopted any dedicated statement on their section 106 policy.⁸¹ Four boroughs have not even issued guidance.⁸² This adds to confusion for developers, and can lead to missed opportunities by boroughs, unable to negotiate full public value through section 106. The London Assembly found that over the last two years cash benefits secured by the boroughs through section 106 ranged between £155,000 to £35 million.⁸³

We want all borough councils to produce guidance on how section 106 will be implemented, to be published with their Local Development Plan.

There is concern that when the powers for negotiating planning applications of strategic importance to London are changed under the GLA Act 2007, the Mayor will be able to redistribute section 106 cash from the local communities affected by developments to other parts of London. 73% of Registered Social Landlords expect the Mayor to become the 'lead party' for section 106 agreement on major projects.⁸⁴

Under these circumstances, we will consult with local residents, in partnership with the relevant borough council(s), on the most valuable form to the local area that the section 106 agreement can take – whether that is investing in local open spaces, making improvements to transport links, or investing in education and health.⁸⁵ The planning obligation secured will be invested in the local community, and not diverted to another part of London.

Increasing Intermediate Housing

It is our ambition that any Londoner should be able to own their own home, regardless of their income.

Currently, within the 50% affordable housing target, there is a requirement for 70% to be social rented housing and 30% to be intermediate housing on each development.

Ken Livingstone has objected to Local Development Frameworks that do not adhere to the 70:30 split, resulting in fewer opportunities for key workers or those in low-income households to get onto the housing ladder. The pace of shared equity units coming onto the housing market is incredibly slow. In 2006/7, just 3 new shared equity homes were built in Hillingdon; 8 in Barnet; and 16 in Westminster.⁸⁶

The report by the London Housing Board made clear that future demand for intermediate housing will increase in the capital, stating:

⁸¹ London Assembly, Who gains? The operation of section 106 agreements in London, March 2008, page 20.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid, page 9.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ The London Assembly found that during 2007, section 106 was spent on transport and access improvements (29% of s106s), open spaces (24%), and education and health (21%). London Assembly, Who Gains? report, pages 19-20.

⁸⁶ GLA, More low cost homes for London, The Londoner, January 2008.

“During 2006-08, a balance of nearer 50:50 is anticipated. This is partly as a result of the Government’s priority to assist key public sector workers, in order to strengthen recruitment and retention in London’s essential services... By 2008/09, the proportion of social rented to intermediate housing coming from all sources is forecast to be around 60:40.”⁸⁷

The draft Regional Housing Strategy ignored this advice, and the GLA Act 2007 has now transferred the powers of the London Housing Board to the Mayor of London.

We believe borough councils should have the freedom to build more intermediate housing units.

We will increase the percentage of intermediate housing in London by a third, to allow more opportunities for low-income families and key sector workers to get on the housing ladder in the capital. We will listen to the evidence presented by the then London Housing Board by amending the London Plan and Housing Strategy to introduce a 60:40 split on each development.

It is estimated that 95,000 Londoners in social rented accommodation are of the appropriate age and income to enter into shared equity and staircase to eventually owning their own home.⁸⁸

We would like to see the Government establish a one-stop shop to advise existing social tenants how they can benefit from shared equity schemes. By moving social tenants into shared equity, we not only help more people into home ownership, but release much-needed social housing for people on waiting lists.

Tackling London’s Empty Homes Crisis

Under Ken Livingstone, the number of empty homes owned by public bodies, such as the GLA, has almost doubled since 2002.⁸⁹ The number of empty homes owned by the borough councils is at its highest for six years, despite the transfer of housing stock to housing associations.⁹⁰ There are at least 79 abandoned homes owned by TfL at the North Circular, N11.⁹¹

Empty homes blight neighbourhoods – they are also an absurdity when London desperately requires new housing. Housing waiting lists have increased by more than 68% under Ken Livingstone; in some boroughs, such as Barking and Dagenham, and Haringey, waiting lists have more than tripled.⁹² Nearly 61,000 households were living in temporary accommodation in the capital at the end of

⁸⁷ London Housing Board, London Housing Strategy 2005-2016.

⁸⁸ GLA, Draft Housing Strategy 2007.

⁸⁹ In 2002 the number of public owned empty homes was 619. The latest figures show the number of public owned empty homes in 2006 to be 999. Empty Homes Agency, Regional Statistics, 2002 to 2006.

⁹⁰ In 2002 the number of local authority empty homes stood at 9,917. The latest figures for 2006 show an increase to 10,107. Empty Homes Agency, Regional Statistics, 2002 to 2006.

⁹¹ The sad story of the creation of a slum in North London, Empty Homes Agency, 2006.

⁹² Department for Communities and Local Government, WPQ, Hansard, 13 November 2007, col. 116W.

2006, with close to 2,200 families in bed and breakfast.⁹³ Over 21,000 households were accepted as homeless in London last year.⁹⁴

We will make it a priority to return dormant homes to the housing stock to dramatically cut London's long waiting lists.

Regenerating Communities

The latest figures show that there are 84,205 homes left empty in the capital.⁹⁵ Half of these are in the outer boroughs, and overall one third are empty for longer than six months.

Getting empty homes occupied will help increase housing stock and improve the local environment. Empty homes are havens for crime and anti-social behaviour – one in five residents said it reduced their enjoyment of the street, and a quarter of people say they would not buy next to an empty house.⁹⁶ For that reason, house prices are a staggering 17% lower in areas with empty homes.⁹⁷

Ken Livingstone's target for reducing the number of unoccupied homes lacks ambition for London – his draft Regional Housing Strategy wants to see a reduction in the share of empty homes of just 0.2% by 2016.⁹⁸

London needs new energy and fresh thinking to tackle its empty homes crisis. We will amend the Housing Strategy, outlining a programme to cut the number of empty dwellings to 1% by 2011.

London-wide Audit

London needs a new comprehensive audit to map all of London's empty homes, published with the next progress report on the London Plan. This audit approach works. The experience of other cities shows that listing empty buildings is the first step to regeneration. In 1997, the Mayor of Boston, Thomas Menino, launched the city's Abandoned Buildings Survey – in the decade since, the number of abandoned residential properties has declined by 77%.⁹⁹

At present, empty home numbers are based on Council Tax receipts. Although this is the single best source for measuring the number of empty homes within a borough, there are ongoing concerns that it is producing inaccuracies in the data; for example, private owners failing to register their home for Council Tax purposes.

London is in a good position to conduct a new audit. It is already divided into five sub-regions, each with an appointed Empty Properties Officer, operating in each of

⁹³ Housing Federation, Home Truths, 2007, page 8.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Empty Homes Agency, London Totals 2006.

⁹⁶ Halifax, One in four affected by empty homes, 10 December 2007.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ GLA Draft Housing Strategy 2007, page 39.

⁹⁹ Speech by Mayor of Boston, Thomas Menino, Rehabilitating vacant buildings, Drum Major Institute for Public Policy, 19 November 2007.

the boroughs. The borough-by-borough audit would itemise who owns the property (for example, a borough council, housing association, public body, or private owner), how long it has been empty for, and how many properties have been reoccupied during the previous twelve months. This grid would be published as part of the next Annual Monitoring Report for the London Plan. In particular, the London audit would include for the first time a list of 'hidden homes' above tube stations and industrial property on the GLA estate.

Meeting Regeneration Costs

We also need to get empty properties brought up to the Government's 'Decent Homes' standard and use them to help people off housing waiting lists.

Around eight out of ten of London's empty homes are owned privately, which is where we need to focus our resources.¹⁰⁰ In the draft Housing Strategy, the funding stream (which includes funds for empty home renovation) has been allocated just 9% of the Regional Housing Pot 2008-11.¹⁰¹ This funding stream is spread across four programmes, one of which is related to improving the conditions of empty private homes to get them reoccupied. It is clear the empty homes programme is losing out – it is projected in 2008/9, for example, to receive just one tenth of the funding stream, the lowest of the four programmes.¹⁰²

During 2006-08, £15 million has been allocated to regenerating empty homes.¹⁰³ This is divided fairly equally between the five sub-regions. For example, during 2006-8, the West London sub-region received £3 million¹⁰⁴ and the North London sub-region £3.375 million.¹⁰⁵ The sub-regions then allocate this funding between the boroughs and set a target for the number of empty homes to be brought back into use across the sub-region. The targets are relatively low. Within the West London sub-region, for example, only 186 homes were targeted last year.¹⁰⁶ Although this target was slightly exceeded, it tackled only a fraction of the overall problem. At the start of the year, the six boroughs that constitute the West London sub-region had a total of 15,241 empty homes, 12,762 owned privately.¹⁰⁷

We will increase substantially the amount of funding available to bring empty homes back into occupancy, by providing a further £60 million over 2008-11, on the condition the homes are then let to someone in social housing need. Our approach also recognises the costs involved in bringing an empty home back into use. Estimates of the costs differ widely, although some are as high as £28,788.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁰ In 2006, 69,485 homes were owned privately out of the 84,205 total empty stock. Empty Homes Agency, Regional Statistics, 2006.

¹⁰¹ Draft Housing Strategy 2007, page 156.

¹⁰² Draft Regional Housing Strategy, page 162.

¹⁰³ London Councils Housing Forum, Financial Update, 5 December 2007.

¹⁰⁴ London Empty Homes Agency annual meeting minutes, 23 February 2007.

¹⁰⁵ North London sub region empty homes initiative, 2007.

¹⁰⁶ London Empty Homes Agency annual meeting minutes, 23 February 2007.

¹⁰⁷ Empty Homes Agency, Regional Statistics, 2006.

¹⁰⁸ Halifax, One in four affected by empty homes, 10 December 2007.

This fund is four times that budgeted for by Ken Livingstone. This will be met through the Regional Housing Pot for 2008-11. The Government Office for London has advised that £60 million less will be required for the 'Decent Homes' programme. Ken Livingstone agreed to reallocate this money to the main programme for affordable homes, already budgeted by the GLA.¹⁰⁹ Instead, we would allocate the £60 million to the five London sub-regions to kick-start a new drive towards renovating empty homes in their boroughs, reoccupying them with tenants on social housing waiting lists.

Cutting Waiting Lists

The new funding will be available to the Empty Homes Grant Scheme, allocated by the Empty Homes Officers and operated at borough council level. This allows private owners to bid for funds to renovate their empty homes.

In return, most of London's councils specify that the completed unit is then let to someone on the housing waiting list. For example, Barnet requires the homes to be let through a housing association for at least five years; Islington and Barking and Dagenham allocate homes to key sector workers for three years.¹¹⁰ We would require the same approach for new homes benefiting from the increase from the Regional Housing Pot.

This measure will make a real difference to cutting borough waiting lists. There is correlation between a high number of empty homes within a borough, and long housing waiting lists.¹¹¹

Tackling Long-term Empty Homes

To ensure value for money, we will require this money to be targeted in the first instance to long-term empty homes. There are ten boroughs in London with privately-owned homes that have been empty for longer than six months, including 2,040 homes that are dormant in Croydon; 1,611 in Waltham Forest; and 1,511 in Brent.¹¹²

We will ensure the new funding is targeted at bringing homes that have been empty in the first instance for longer than twelve months, and then six months, back into occupancy with tenants currently on social housing waiting lists.

¹⁰⁹ The Draft Housing Strategy allocated £500 million to the Decent Homes programme. In a letter to the Chair of the London Assembly on 18 December 2007, Ken Livingstone outlined how the Government Office of London had advised the GLA that only £440 million would be required. Ken Livingstone notified the Assembly in the same letter that the surplus would be allocated to the main programme.

¹¹⁰ Empty Homes Agency, *How Grants Work*, 2007.

¹¹¹ For waiting lists by borough see Department for Communities and Local Government, WPQ, Hansard, 13 November 2007, col. 116W.

¹¹² The other are Haringey – 1,275; Kensington and Chelsea – 1,109; Lewisham – 1,300; Westminster – 1,598; Ealing – 1,749; Greenwich – 1,579; Redbridge – 1,310. Empty Homes Agency, *Regional Statistics*, 2006.

Ending Empty Home Tax Rebates

Homeowners are at present exempt from Council Tax for the first year a property is empty and are given up to a 50% discount thereafter.¹¹³ Local authorities are able to abolish the exemption and the discount – but it is estimated that only about half of London's boroughs have used the powers granted to them in the Local Government Act 2003 to do so.¹¹⁴ We will call on London councils to abolish the Council Tax discount after the first year of dormancy on privately-owned, long-term empty homes, to encourage their return to the housing stock.

Returning The Mayor's Precept

The number of empty properties owned by public bodies has almost doubled under Ken Livingstone. Two boroughs in London, Lambeth and Southwark, each own over 1,000 empty homes.¹¹⁵

We intend to incentivise the borough councils by returning the Mayor's Council Tax precept to boroughs in special circumstances.

London boroughs sometimes remove homes they own from the housing stock, and designate them for a different use. In circumstances where the house is definitely being permanently removed from the housing stock, then rather than the home being empty (possibly for a long period of time) we will provide a financial incentive to the borough councils to hand the home to a specialist short life housing provider on a temporary basis.

Short life housing provides accommodation to people who are stuck in unsuitable housing, frequently bed and breakfasts. Given that close to 2,200 families are housed in bed and breakfast accommodation in London, encouraging short life housing will make a real difference to the quality of life of those Londoners as a step towards permanent housing.¹¹⁶

To encourage borough councils to do this, we will return the Mayor's precept to them.¹¹⁷ According to Brent Community Housing, 75% of their short life housing tenants are economically active, meaning that they are very likely to pay some level of Council Tax. This means borough councils will benefit from every penny of the Council Tax paid on the property, including the Mayor's share.

We are also encouraged by short life providers supplying accommodation to key sector workers, including hospital cleaners and porters, who all provide essential public services. Indeed, in Hammersmith and Fulham, the key worker short life scheme only accepts referrals from the health authority, the social services, or the

¹¹³ Department for Communities and Local Government, A Guide to Your Council Tax Bill, 2007.

¹¹⁴ GLA Draft Housing Strategy 2007, page 35.

¹¹⁵ Empty Homes Agency, Regional Statistics, 2006.

¹¹⁶ Housing Federation, Home Truths, 2007, page 8.

¹¹⁷ The monthly return of the precept will last for the length of the first occupancy.

prison service.¹¹⁸ The precept return will not apply to local authority homes transferred to Registered Social Landlords.

Finding 'Hidden Homes'

We also welcome the work some boroughs are undertaking on 'hidden homes' within their boundaries. 'Hidden homes' often convert existing structures, such as an underground car park, or find places to build new homes, such as above a Tube station.

For example, in 2003 Wandsworth Borough Council initiated a comprehensive search to renovate 'hidden homes' in the borough. This has so far led to 130 buildings being reoccupied.¹¹⁹

Wandsworth believes there are 10,000 'hidden homes' in London.¹²⁰ This is in addition to empty homes.

Ken Livingstone's attitude towards 'hidden homes' schemes is out of touch. In September 2007, he condemned Wandsworth Borough Council's initiative as follows: "the name 'Hidden Homes' says it all – it seems like Wandsworth is determined to treat these social tenants as second class citizens and hide them away from the rest of the world."¹²¹

We would encourage other boroughs to undertake an assessment to find 'hidden homes', and as part of the London-wide audit the GLA will identify potential 'hidden homes' on its estate above tube stations and commercial property.

Protecting Private Tenants

There are estimated to be 566,000 private sector tenants in London – approximately one in five of the national total.¹²² This means over 139,000 more people are renting today compared to when Ken Livingstone first came to office, and on current trends a further 212,000 people will be in the private rented sector by 2012.¹²³

The cost of renting in London has increased dramatically. The average monthly rent in London is estimated at £843, increasing by 33% since 2000.¹²⁴ This is significantly higher than the rest of England. Not surprisingly, rents vary enormously between boroughs. The last snapshot survey of London rental costs by borough was conducted in 2005. It found that living in central London was about a quarter more

¹¹⁸ Empty Homes Agency, Guide to Short Life Housing, 2007.

¹¹⁹ Wandsworth Borough Council, Hidden Homes Strategy, 2007.

¹²⁰ Wandsworth Borough Council, Hidden Homes Strategy, 2007.

¹²¹ GLA, Press release: Wandsworth 'Hidden Homes' scheme increases segregation, 14 September 2007.

¹²² Table S135, Tenure by Government Office Region, 2006.

¹²³ Ibid, 2000. The private sector rental market is estimated to grow by around 2% per annum.

¹²⁴ Table 743: Rents, letting and tenancies: mean rent of free market private tenancies: by region, 1995-2007, Department for Communities and Local Government.

expensive than outer London, with Westminster the most expensive borough in which to live.¹²⁵

This means the average upfront payment to rent in London is £1686, half of which represents the deposit. Given that 74% of people in the private rented sector earn less than £40,000 gross, and the overwhelming majority (61%) less than £30,000 gross, this represents around one month's net salary for most private tenants in London.¹²⁶

We recognise the importance of the buy-to-let sector in London. Unlike some other countries, such as the Netherlands and Germany, fixing rent levels would be wrong in the UK. However, we do believe there is value in an online borough-by-borough guide, broken down by number of bedrooms, to ensure tenants feel confident that they are getting value for money. In particular, this will help students, as many of the 120,905 students at London's universities will rent in the private sector during their university course.¹²⁷

Stopping Delayed Deposits

Evidence suggests that one in three private tenants will not get their full deposit back, and worse still, half will not get any money returned to them.¹²⁸ One in ten tenants said that the landlord simply gave no reason.¹²⁹

Landlords are now obliged to sign up to a Tenancy Deposit Protection scheme. None of these offer a guaranteed dispute resolution period if the landlord and tenant cannot agree on how much of the deposit should be returned. Given that most tenants enter another tenancy agreement when they move, if the deposit is not returned within the agreement notice period, they will end up with almost one month's wages in limbo with landlords.¹³⁰

We will investigate introducing a new Tenancy Deposit Scheme for London on rent paid up to £25,000 per annum, offering a guaranteed alternative dispute resolution service within four weeks, which represents the minimum notice period on most tenancy agreements. The scheme will also award interest to tenants. Similar schemes are self-financing based on the interest earned.

¹²⁵ GLA Private rents bulletin, 2005.

¹²⁶ This is based on all assured tenancies. Table S521, Gross annual income of tenancy group by type of letting, 2005/6, Department for Communities and Local Government.

¹²⁷ London: High Education Statistics 2007.

¹²⁸ Table S565, Whether deposit returned, 2005/6, Department for Communities and Local Government.

¹²⁹ Table S566, Reasons for and tenant views of non-return of deposit, 2005/6, Department for Communities and Local Government. 49% of tenants believe their deposit should have been returned, and 11% of tenants were given no reason by the landlord when their deposit was withheld.

¹³⁰ Over half of tenancies (54%) last less than three years, with 27% lasting fewer than 12 months. Given that by far the majority of existing tenants have moved within the previous year (86%), this strongly suggests that, as we would expect, tenants in the private sector undertake a number of contracts with landlords before buying a home or moving to another type of accommodation, reinforcing the idea Londoners can have a significant amount of their income held in deposit.

Thames Gateway

The Government plans to build 160,000 houses and create 225,000 jobs¹³¹ in the Thames Gateway region of East London by 2016, bringing in 350,000 new residents and boosting the area's population by 22%.¹³² It could add as much as £12 billion a year to the UK's economy.¹³³

Delivering on the Thames Gateway will be one of the Mayor of London's top priorities. We are concerned that the Public Accounts Committee revealed in November 2007 that despite already spending £673m on the project since 2003, the Department for Communities and Local Government had failed to put in place basic arrangements for controlling the project - including a budget. It said the Department's handling of the project had been 'weak'.¹³⁴

Furthermore, the National Audit Office said in May 2007 that although 24,000 homes were built between 2001 and 2005, the rate of increase has been slower than the rest of Southern England and will need to double if the target of 160,000 homes is to be met. It said the DCLG needed to demonstrate 'stronger leadership'.¹³⁵

The Thames Gateway Strategy Partnership, set up in 2000 and modified in 2005 to coordinate between central and local government, is still failing to coordinate effectively. The Public Accounts Committee stated that "there is a risk of uncoordinated delivery across the Thames Gateway, inefficiencies in procurement, and a lack of capacity in some areas."¹³⁶ The complex partnership networks result in unclear delivery chains for individual projects. Projects have multiple lines of reporting and accountability. For instance, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds was provided with more than £4 million for the new visitor centre at Rainham Marshes from four separate public bodies: the East of England Development Agency, Greengrid South Essex, London Thames Gateway Development Corporation and Thurrock Thames Gateway Development Corporation.¹³⁷

We are concerned that under the London Plan's new division of sub-regions, the Thames Gateway and the Olympic Park are divided unhelpfully. We will encourage cooperation between boroughs in the area by amending the London Plan to allow for flexibility around the sub-regions involved.

¹³¹ Rt Hon Gordon Brown MP, Speech at the Thames Gateway Conference, 29 November 2007.

¹³² House of Commons Public Accounts Committee, *The Thames Gateway: Laying the Foundations*, October 2007, paragraph 22.

¹³³ House of Commons Public Accounts Committee, *The Thames Gateway: Laying the Foundations*, October 2007, Summary.

¹³⁴ House of Commons Public Accounts Committee, *The Thames Gateway: Laying the Foundations*, October 2007, Recommendation 1, page 5.

¹³⁵ National Audit Office Press Notice, 23 May 2007.

¹³⁶ House of Commons Public Accounts Committee, *The Thames Gateway: Laying the Foundations*, October 2007, Recommendation 1, paragraphs 8 and 9.

¹³⁷ House of Commons Public Accounts Committee, *The Thames Gateway: Laying the Foundations*, October 2007, Recommendation 1, paragraph 11.

Building For Life

Design quality must be central to London's housing strategy. According to the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment, 84% of new housing in London was considered either 'poor' or 'average'.¹³⁸

CABE recommended changes to "both the design process to bring forward sound proposals and the planning regime to intervene and improve submitted proposals."¹³⁹

Londoners should not have to settle for mediocre housing. We want building quality to be central to the Housing Strategy, to be applied to the character of new developments, roads and parking. There is evidence that since the introduction of Planning Policy Supplement 3, developers are failing to take a consistent approach to design solutions.

We also believe it is important to involve Registered Social Landlords and housing associations in the design of new affordable housing. There is evidence that this approach works, such as the superior design quality of Time House at Clapham Junction, which will be comprised of 36 intermediate units, jointly designed by the developer, Berkeley First, and the Thames Valley Housing Association.¹⁴⁰ In the Housing Strategy we will call for the involvement of RSLs in the design of affordable housing units.

¹³⁸ CABE, Housing Audit: assessing the design quality of new homes, October 2004, page 21.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Affordable Housing: new social butterflies, The Independent, 27 February 2008.

2. Designing Developments To Combat Crime

- **I will make designing out crime a key priority in the London Plan and the Mayor's Housing Strategy to prevent creating poor-quality housing where crime flourishes.**

Few things affect people's quality of life more than crime and the fear of crime. Violent crime and anti-social behaviour are wrecking lives and undermining communities in London.

The Mayor, borough councils, planners, and house builders all have a role to play in designing out crime and making our communities safer and stronger.

Most local authorities have sought to cut crime on housing estates by following the principles outlined in Secured By Design, a national scheme of the Association of Chief Police Officers. This includes creating defensible space; organising the built environment so that anti-social behaviour is less likely to be ignored; creating space that generalises a sense of ownership, such as front gardens, rather than space which promotes anonymity; and promoting natural surveillance from residents' houses.

Houses that meet ACPO Secured By Design (SBD) standards experience a quarter less crime than non-SBD houses, and residents' fear of crime is lower.¹⁴¹

For instance, a study by Bedfordshire Police reported crime and disorder on a 4,500-home development incorporating Secured By Design principles will average approximately 680 incidents a year. The same number of homes in an estate incorporating the Government's planning principles will result in 4,080 crime and disorder incidents a year, six times as many as on a Secured By Design development.¹⁴²

The Association of Chief Police Officers has written that:

"Natural surveillance is a cornerstone in the achievement of community safety. Where the likelihood of being seen is low, the risks perceived by potential offenders are also low and the likelihood of crimes being committed will be higher. Ensuring that spaces around buildings, footpath routes, open spaces and parking areas in residential developments are open to view from adjoining occupied properties and/or well-trafficked routes can assist in discouraging criminal activity, by increasing the risk of detection, reducing opportunities for crime and making potential offenders feel more vulnerable. The greater the level of use of public spaces by responsible citizens, the greater will be the degree of natural surveillance."¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ Home Office press release, Design Alliance: fighting crime from the drawing board, 14 August 2007.

¹⁴² Bedfordshire Police, The Cost of Policing New Urbanism, April 2003, page 3.

¹⁴³ Association of Chief Police Officers, *Secured By Design Principles report*, 3.1.

There are several more examples of the concept working around England and Wales:

Royds, Bradford

In 1995, the Royds area was one of the worst in the UK for house burglaries, with a divisional average of 138 forced entries per 1,000 households. Working with local police and residents, architects implemented Secured By Design principles relating to layout, defensible space, access opportunities and natural surveillance.¹⁴⁴ Between 1998 and 2003, there were no forced-entry burglaries in Royds and there was a 69% reduction in dwelling burglary across the whole area.¹⁴⁵

Kent

Renewal.net (part of the Government's National Strategy Action Plan for neighbourhood renewal) has reported that introducing Secured By Design principles into the Swanley Estate in Kent led to an immediate increase in residents' sense of privacy and security. This was matched by a 92% reduction in burglary, an 86% reduction in criminal damage, an 85% reduction in theft from vehicles, and a 64% reduction in offences involving violence.¹⁴⁶

West Yorkshire

After two housing estates in West Yorkshire were refurbished to Secured By Design standards, crime on the estates fell by 67% and 54% respectively, between April 1999 and March 2000. For incidents of theft of a motor vehicle, theft from a motor vehicle and taking without consent, there were 42% fewer offences following the refurbishment.¹⁴⁷

Gwent

An analysis of recorded crime data on 9,173 housing association properties in Gwent between 1996 and 1998 found that: "While the non-SBD homes suffered an annual burglary rate per thousand homes of 15.9, the SBD sample was 6.9." There were 5.1 vehicle thefts per thousand households for non-SBD properties, but just 1.9 per thousand households for SBD properties.¹⁴⁸

Despite this evidence, Ken Livingstone is failing to prioritise the principles of designing out crime. He mentions the principle only once in his statutory Draft Housing Strategy.

I will make designing out crime a key priority in the London Plan and the Mayor's Housing Strategy to prevent creating poor-quality housing where crime flourishes.

¹⁴⁴ Royds Community Association, Housing by Royds Community Association, 23 March 2006.

¹⁴⁵ Home Office/Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, Safer Places: The Planning System and Crime Prevention, 2004, page 59.

¹⁴⁶ Renewal.net Solving the Problem, Secured By Design, page 4.

¹⁴⁷ Brown J., Designing out crime – Gwent, a case study, Secured By Design housing within West Yorkshire, September 2000.

¹⁴⁸ Brown J., Designing out crime – Gwent, a case study, 24 March 2006.

3. Protecting Green Spaces And Historic Views

I will:

- **Protect ten historic views of St Paul's Cathedral and the Palace of Westminster by reinstating the original viewing corridor under Regional Planning Guidance 3A (RPG3A).**
- **Amend the London Plan to protect three additional sites in London, rejecting future planning applications that obstruct views from St James's Park towards Horse Guards Road; the bridge over the Serpentine in Hyde Park to Westminster; and Island Gardens on the Isle of Dogs to the Royal Naval College.**
- **Call on the Government to adopt the 'Merton Rule' to promote the use of on-site renewable energy.**
- **Amend the London Plan to urge developers to adopt the Sustainable Code to build low carbon homes for the private sector market.**
- **Publish a specific outer London development strategy.**
- **Amend the London Plan to protect domestic gardens from new development.**
- **Encourage planners to use section 106 to secure affordable units for small, independent shops.**

London's Skyline

It is hugely embarrassing that the United Nations cultural office, UNESCO, considers two of London's greatest architectural triumphs, the Tower of London and the Palace of Westminster, potential candidates for the endangered list of world heritage sites, joining the likes of the Ashur Palace in Iraq and the Minaret in Afghanistan.¹⁴⁹

London's skyline is precious. Tall buildings must be part of London's development, but not at the expense of existing landmarks. Tourists flock to London because of its landmarks, and 91% of people want views protected around St Paul's and the the Palace of Westminster.¹⁵⁰

Reinstating Protection Of Ten London Views

London needs a Mayor who values London's skyline. Under RPG3A (1991), ten strategic views were protected in London, eight of St Paul's Cathedral and two of the Palace of Westminster. Applications for new developments are assessed against the impact they would have on views of the two landmarks. Planning applications would

¹⁴⁹ The UNESCO World Heritage Committee has asked for a further report on proposed developments around the Houses of Parliament and the Tower of London in 2008.

¹⁵⁰ English Heritage, Public attitudes towards tall buildings in cities, 2001.

be refused if they threaten these views by crossing the official line between the strategic viewpoint and the landmark.

Under the new London Plan, and the accompanying London View Management Framework (LVMF), the widths of viewing corridors and assessment areas (geometric protection) have been reduced from that in RPG3A.¹⁵¹ We will reinstate the original viewing corridors under RPG3A.

Views Of The City, Not City Hall

Ken Livingstone has found time to add a new protection zone to the London Plan – views from City Hall. The LVMF designates a “protected vista” from the “strategically important landmark” that is City Hall, stating that “the Mayor will, and boroughs should, normally refuse or direct refusal of developments in front and middle ground assessment areas that are overly intrusive, unsightly or prominent to the detriment of the view as a whole.”

The current London Plan gives undue priority to skyscrapers, in particular policy 4B.9, which outlines how “the Mayor will promote the development of tall buildings”.¹⁵² We need more balance in the London Plan. This will be achieved by removing the promotion of tall buildings from it, and amending the Plan to adhere to the original viewing corridors set in the RPG3A.

New Clarity To The London View Management Framework

We will bring clarity to the LVMF, which has introduced an additional 16 views of London landmarks (26, including the 10 original viewpoints).

The problem is that the Framework offers no actual protection even close to the ‘linear assessment area’ which replaced RPG3A. For example, it affords no protection to the view from the bridge in St James’s Park, across Horse Guards Road. Three tall buildings are threatening this historic part of London’s skyline, including the 43-floor Doon Street development which is currently being considered by a Planning Inspector.¹⁵³

Ken Livingstone is vigorously supporting Doon Street, despite the fact that this entirely residential development will have no units of affordable housing – completely contrary to the London Plan’s 50% target.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ The current ‘wider setting consultation area’ is to be replaced with ‘Linear assessment area’, which is no longer, in all cases, directly related symmetrically to the dome of St Paul’s Cathedral.

¹⁵² GLA, The London Plan, February 2008.

¹⁵³ The 43 floor skyscraper could be built immediately behind the National Theatre on the South Bank, and would infringe the view from the bridge within St James’s Park, despite the protection which is meant to be afforded by the Framework, and would also be visible from the Grade I listed Somerset House.

¹⁵⁴ English Heritage, A towering mistake for the London skyline, 2007.

The protection offered by the London View Management Framework to existing strategic views is wholly inadequate. It states that any tall building proposed along the St James's skyline should be of "exceptional design quality" and "appropriate scale" – in other words, it implicitly gives the 'green light' to development.

We need a fresh approach. RPG3A offered protection to London's historic views through a series of geometric definitions at different assessment points. The end product is a 'cone'. We need to apply the same 'wide definition' protection that has been afforded to from City Hall to the Tower of London to:

- St James's Park towards Horse Guards Road
- The bridge over the Serpentine in Hyde Park to Westminster
- Island Gardens on the Isle of Dogs to the Royal Naval College.¹⁵⁵

This would protect, through a visual 'cone', several historic short-range views across London, the boundaries within which no development can take place.

To agree the geometric definitions of each 'cone', we would appoint a panel of experts, including the building industry, representatives of the architects, and the heritage industry. We would also welcome the involvement of UNESCO to restore confidence that our great city's skyline will be protected.

The claim that a buffer zone would stifle London's commercial development has been rejected by the London Planning Advisory Committee and a House of Commons Select Committee, and those rejections have been endorsed by the Government. In particular, the Select Committee concluded that no company had been put off locating in London because of lack of office space, and that there was in any case plenty of other areas suitable for development.¹⁵⁶

Freedom For Borough Councils

We want to encourage more on-site renewable energy generation in London. Some borough councils have been setting high standards for on-site energy generation on developments. For example, Croydon required a 15% on-site renewable energy target on new developments in 2007.¹⁵⁷

Merton Borough Council has devised the 'Merton Rule' which set this target by unit size.¹⁵⁸ We are concerned that the latest draft of the Climate Change Planning Policy Supplement undermines the Merton Rule by requiring councils to avoid compulsory

¹⁵⁵ GLA, The London Plan 2008, page 258.

¹⁵⁶ Select Committee on Department Local Government and the Regions report, Tall Buildings, 2002, together with the Government's response.

¹⁵⁷ GLA, The London Plan, 2008.

¹⁵⁸ Named after Merton Council where it was first used, the Merton Rule requires all new developments (over a certain size and number) to generate a minimum percentage of its energy through on-site renewable technologies.

on-site renewable requirements. This would be a major setback for London's carbon emissions reduction targets.

We will vigorously call on the Government to amend the current Housing and Regeneration Bill to legally protect borough councils that decide to adopt the Merton Rule from judicial review, giving them statutory protection to adopt it, should they choose to do so.

New Private Sector Builds

Whilst we welcome the new Code for Sustainable Homes (CSH) 1 to 6 star system to indicate overall sustainability performance of a home for public housing, the National Housing Federation estimates that 92% of public sector developments in 2007/8 will be at or above Level 3, in other words 'very good' or better on the eco homes assessment criteria.¹⁵⁹ The challenge is private builds, where the CSH remains voluntary. We will clarify the Housing Strategy to call for *all* new homes in London to meet Level 3 of the Code by 2010, and Level 6 by 2016.

Regenerating Outer London

Ken Livingstone has neglected London's suburbs. The London Plan is a zone 1 plan, despite the fact that 47% of new housing built before 2016 will be in the suburbs.¹⁶⁰ Over 4.6 million people live in the outer boroughs, and this is expected to grow by 10% over the next 20 years.¹⁶¹ 42% of jobs are located in London's nineteen outer boroughs, and this is expected to grow by 11% over the next 20 years.¹⁶²

We believe the Mayor of London has important responsibilities through the GLA, TfL and the LDA to help outer boroughs meet Planning Policy Statement 6.

This promotes town centre vitality and viability by; planning for the growth and development of existing centres; promoting and enhancing existing centres, by focusing development in such centres and encouraging a wide range of services in good environments.¹⁶³

To compliment the London Plan we will produce a separate strategy on how to encourage sustainable economic growth in outer London. We will oversee the process and engage a group of leading businesspeople, entrepreneurs and councillors from the outer London boroughs to draw up the proposals.

¹⁵⁹ The future of the Code for Sustainable Homes – Making a rating mandatory, DCLG 23 July 2007. One star indicates entry level, with standards set above the level of the Buildings regulations, the minimum statutory building standards. Six stars is the highest level, deemed to be exemplar at current standards.

¹⁶⁰ London Assembly, Semi-detached: connecting London's suburbs, June 2007, page 7.

¹⁶¹ Ibid, page 27.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Department for Communities and Local Government, Planning for Town Centres, 2007.

Saving Small Shops

It is estimated that around 7,000 small shops in London have closed over the last six years. Given the important part SMEs play in London's economy, this is worrying. It is a vital sector in London, employing over 400,000 people, and accounting for 9% of total employment. They populate over 200 town centres in the capital,¹⁶⁴ and Londoners are more likely to shop very close to home than anywhere else in the UK.¹⁶⁵

The latest survey of small shops in the capital, by the London Chamber of Commerce, found that the top two pressures cited by independent shops are competition from supermarkets (78%) and rising rents (67%).¹⁶⁶ The Competition Commission recently raised concerns over the impact of supermarkets, calling for local planning authorities to adopt a 'competition test' when they decide whether a new store should go ahead. This would mean planners would be able to stop a supermarket chain building another store in an area if they already had local dominance.¹⁶⁷ Supermarkets can hold an incredibly dominant market share. According to data from CACI, for example, Tesco holds a 47% market share in Twickenham.¹⁶⁸

Property costs are a serious concern for small retailers, and with good reason: they are currently rising much faster than sales growth.¹⁶⁹ The UK is the only country in Europe to fuse long leases with upward rent reviews.¹⁷⁰

We need to preserve small, independent shops. We will amend the London Plan to help protect them by encouraging borough councils to use a section 106 (or the proposed Community Infrastructure Levy proposed under the Planning and Regeneration Bill) to secure a proportion of 'affordable' units for small, independent retailers in large retail developments.

Stop The Garden Grab

In addition to protecting London's green belt by using the Mayor's powers to refuse any applications to build on it, we will protect London's gardens. In recent years, London has lost to concrete a quantity of domestic front gardens equivalent to twenty-two times the size of Hyde Park – or the combined equivalent of Hammersmith and Fulham and Islington.¹⁷¹ In 2006 alone, 1,113 London gardens

¹⁶⁴ A Balance of Trade: Everyone can help, Commission on Retail Conservation, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, page 25.

¹⁶⁵ Competition Commission, The supply of groceries in the UK market provision, 31 October 2007.

¹⁶⁶ London Chamber of Commerce, London small shops survey, 2007.

¹⁶⁷ Competition Commission, The supply of groceries in the UK market provision, 31 October 2007.

¹⁶⁸ IGD Convenience Retailing Report, 2005.

¹⁶⁹ IGD Convenience Retailing Report, 2005.

¹⁷⁰ High Street Britain: 2015, All Party Small Shops Group, House of Commons, 2006.

¹⁷¹ London Assembly, Offside: The Loss of London's Playing Fields, May 2006 and London Assembly, Crazy Paving: The environmental importance of London's front gardens, September 2005.

were used for new build, and 10% of planning approvals in Croydon were on domestic gardens, 7% in Sutton, and between 5-7% in Bromley, Ealing, Enfield, and Hillingdon.¹⁷² London has also suffered a net loss of 32 allotment sites, or 4.2% over the last decade in London.¹⁷³

There is now considerable pressure from the Government for higher housing density, for instance, Planning Policy Guidance 3 (2000) details “efficient use of land”, stating:

“30 dwellings per hectare (dph) net should be used as a national indicative minimum to guide policy development and decision-making, until local density targets are in place... where Local Planning Authorities wish to plan for, or agree to, densities below this minimum, this will need to be justified.”¹⁷⁴

The re-classification of domestic gardens under PPG3 has considerably reduced domestic gardens’ protection. We will reverse this by bringing forward further alterations to the London Plan to protect domestic gardens, by adding a presumption to Policy 3D.9 that domestic gardens will not be used for residential development.

This will make a real difference. Since the existing London Plan was published, the proportion of residential land – including gardens – in the capital used for new build has increased. It is imperative that the new housing needed in the capital is not built at the expense of existing open green spaces.

¹⁷²London Assembly Environment Committee, Garden Grabbing Update, 11 October 2007, page 2.

¹⁷³ A lot to lose: London’s disappearing allotments. London Assembly Environment Committee October 2006.

¹⁷⁴ Department for Communities and Local Government, Planning Policy Statement 3: Housing, 29 November 2006.

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