

Density in suburban London

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Density in London

- A policy issue because of the intense overcrowding and poor living conditions of Victorian (London County Council) London
 - In the 20th century, the issue was driven by a response to sprawl
- Inner London had been settled at very high densities, often in very poor conditions
- The area beyond the MBW/LCC area developed at far lower densities, partly as a response to the evils of overcrowding and 'congestion'
- The Green Belt then hemmed in further continuous development
- The arrival of 'planning' then provided a legally-based may of public control of development and, thus, density

Greater London Plan, 1944

STANDARDS FOR RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBOURHOODS (10,000 POPULATION)

1 Location of neighbourhood Ring	2 Net resi- dential density ¹ pop. per acre	3 Land for housing only acres	4 Land for open space ² acres	5 Land for other purposes ³ acres	6 Total land require- ment acres	7 Gross resi- dential density ⁴ pop. per acre
Inner Urban (1) ...	100	100	40	40	180	55
Inner Urban (2) ...	100	100	70	40	210	48
Inner Urban (3) ...	75	133	70	50	253	40
Suburban (1) ...	75	133	70	50	253	40
Suburban (2) ...	50	200	70	60	330	30
Suburban (3) ...	50	200	100	60	360	28
Green Belt (1) ...	50	200	100	60	360	28
Green Belt (2) ...	30	333	100	70	503	20
Outer Country (1)	50	200	100	60	360	28
Outer Country (2)	30	333	100	70	503	20

¹ Net residential density is the average number of persons per acre of Housing area, which comprises the curtilages of the dwellings, access or internal roads and half the main roads up to a maximum of 20 ft., where these give access to residential property.

² With the exception of Inner Urban (1), this figure would include 30 acres of open space for school playing fields of all types, but playing fields for secondary schools would not necessarily be within neighbourhood boundaries.

³ See the following table.

⁴ Gross residential density is the average number of persons per acre of the whole Neighbourhood Unit of 10,000 persons, the requisite total acreage of which is shown in col. 6.

Density 'standards'
as part of the planning
process

Greater London Development Plan Report of Studies 1967

2.18 Although they house 43% of the population, the Group A Boroughs contain only 23% of the residential land. This area, with its preponderance of older housing, contains the major problems of obsolescence and houses without facilities. The dwellings are in worse condition than elsewhere and are older, though even here 1 in 5 has been built since the war. There are twice as many flats as in Group B, though the same proportion of terraced houses. Many more dwellings are without a bath or WC and there are more large and small dwellings. The contrasts in housing characteristics are nowhere more marked than in Tower Hamlets, where 11% of dwellings were built before 1875 and 42% since 1940.

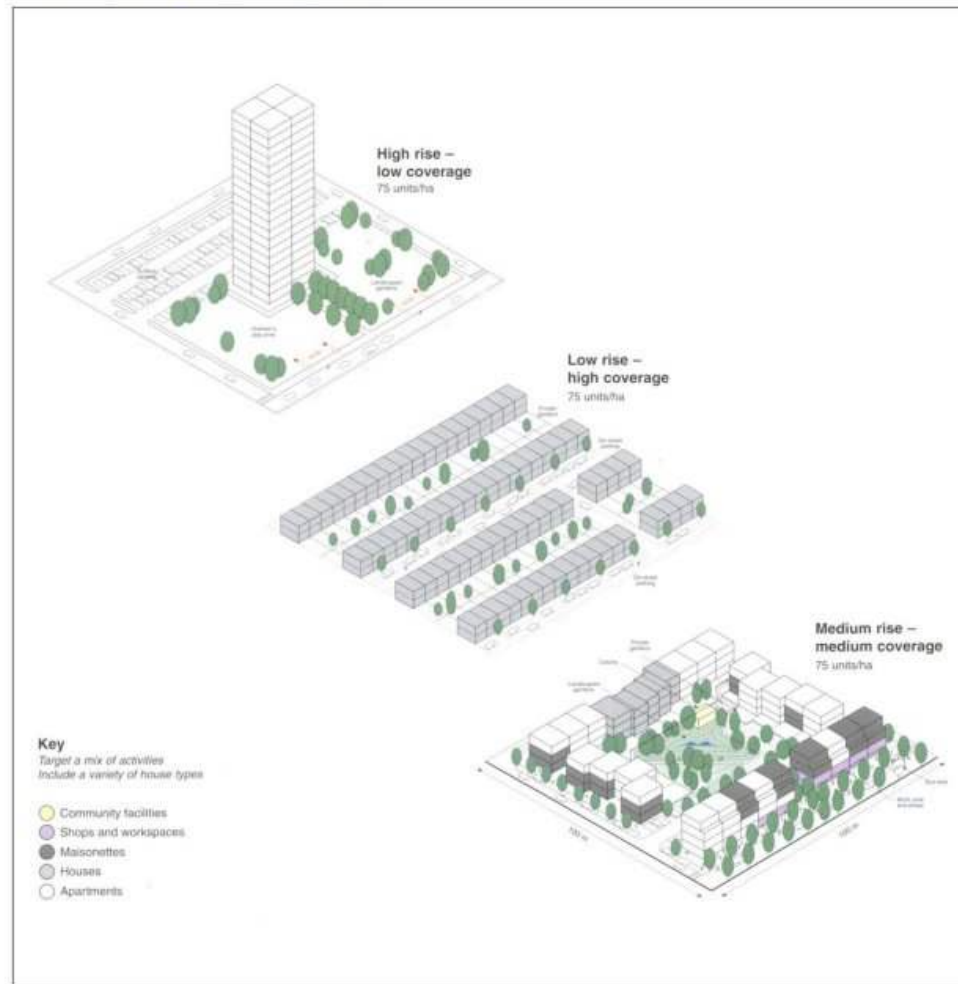
Inner London: 'older' housing
with poor facilities associated
With density

2.20 The excessively high densities within some of the Group A Boroughs make it difficult to provide parks and other facilities. Densities are highest in parts of North Kensington, Westminster and Islington, contrasting strongly with the large areas of low density further out (Figure 2.6).

'Excessively high densities' makes the provision
of parks and other facilities difficult

Urban Task Force, 1999

Figure 2.6: Relationship between density and urban form



(Andrew Wright Associates)

Density good

London Plan, 2004

- 2.22 The suburbs provide a range of employment opportunities, particularly in services, manufacturing, distribution and other uses requiring large floor areas. The public sector also provides a substantial element of employment within suburban London, for example hospitals and schools. Maintaining and enhancing a range of employment uses in suburban areas is important to support sustainable communities. As employment uses become increasingly compatible with residential environments, there may be growing opportunities for local activities, including homeworking and live/work spaces.
- 2.23 Areas around town centres will be most appropriate for higher density development and a greater mix of uses in accordance with their greater levels of accessibility relative to other suburban areas. Development of these areas should be tailored to the level of public transport accessibility. The residential heartlands, as the predominantly residential element of London's suburban fabric, require attention on local improvements to the public realm, maintenance, management and access, as well as some sensitive redevelopment, while having regard to biodiversity issues.
- 2.24 In collaboration with boroughs, the Mayor will prepare good practice guidance and a 'sustainable suburbs' toolkit to guide development policies in suburban centres, employment areas, neighbourhoods and heartlands.

Explicit plan to densify
London's suburbs

Evolution of attitudes to London's suburbs

- Partial, gradual and then rapid sprawl outwards from urban London of the 1860s/80s
- Policy to reduce crowding, density and congestion from LCC/inner London by moving development outwards into and beyond 'Greater' London
- Green Belt and New Towns policies cause development to leap over the Green Belt
- Population decline means only moderate pressure on 'outer London' between the 1950s and 1990s
- Rapid population growth (6.6m to 9.0m) from 1990s to 2010s leads to new, pro-density, policies – reinforced by pro-environment policy

Where this evolution has led

- Demands for higher levels of house-building across London, but with notable impacts in outer boroughs
- Borough-by-borough targets being set in the Mayor's *London Plan* and central government departments
 - Significantly under-shot by most boroughs in most years
- Other changes to policy, eg, Stamp Duty rates, safety regulations and S106/CIL demands have impacted on supply
- Demand remains high but supply remains constrained
 - 'New towns' at Crews Hill and Thamesmead the latest proposal to drive up supply
- Examples of a new outer London/suburban style and density of housing development

Outer boroughs and new densities

Wembley Park [Brent]



Ilford [Redbridge]



Outer boroughs and new densities

Lewisham Town Centre [Lewisham]



North Acton [Ealing]



Outer boroughs and new densities

Kidbrooke (Greenwich)



Colindale (Barnet)



Conclusions

- The policy shift to densify outer London has added new forms of development around Tube and rail stations, but also significant amounts of in-filling and building on car parks and ex-industrial land
 - Often taller, and more dense/bulky than outer borough norms
 - A 'new London vernacular' style?
- The borough structure, even influenced by the *London Plan* process, has led to radical change in parts of much of suburban London – and may spread beyond the GLA boundary
- Densification is likely to continue, albeit at a slower rate
- Is the current model the best possible?
- If not, then what?

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