# Good Growth, Heritage and Housing

## Investigating approaches to future housing in London

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Commissioned by

Historic England

Allies and Morrison

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# Foreword

We know London must grow and change in order to provide the 880,000 new homes required in the next decade. With the challenge comes a real opportunity: to take inspiration from London's rich history and character, and build on these to strengthen its identity.

In this report, in partnership with Allies and Morrison, we explore three ways in which London can progress towards meeting its housing needs. These are: adaptive re-use, sensitive intensification and contextual transformation. All three can be led by character.

Some of the most historic, successful and best loved parts of London provide housing at high densities. Often these places are conservation areas, rich in listed buildings and green spaces. The past that Londoners cherish can suggest solutions to the challenges of the present and future.

The imaginative re-use of existing buildings is an obvious way forward. Beyond that, new development achieved through the intensification of existing areas, or the transformation of large sites, can create places which reinterpret the qualities of London’s historic neighbourhoods in contemporary ways.

We acknowledge that the challenge is great and that the existing character of some parts of London will have to change. It is precisely in these cases that thinking of London itself as a whole, in all its complexity and diversity, and applying lessons learned from the best of London’s historic places is most important. In this way, London can both grow and become 'more London'.



**Tom Foxall**
**Regional Director London and South East**
**Historic England**


*The authors would like to thank the architects, developers, clients and project teams who generously provided drawings and photography to support the preparation of this report.*

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# Enabling Good Growth

## The scale of housing growth needed for London over the next plan period presents an unprecedented challenge.

The Mayor of London is producing a new London Plan: the spatial development strategy that will shape growth and change in our great capital city over the next 20-25 years. Central to this work is an aspiration to deliver 880,000 additional homes in a ten-year period. Historic England recognises that growth of this scale will change some parts of the city, but if development is informed by an understanding of the character of its neighbourhoods, then London's growth may reinforce its identity.

The current London Plan provides a framework for Good Growth, which includes a 'design-led' approach to optimising site capacity. This is a contextual approach to urban development where local character and heritage both can and should act as a catalyst for sustainable, high-quality place-shaping. As the plan moves into its next phase, there is a pressing need to ensure that as London evolves, it retains its identity, fosters social cohesion, and responds decisively to the challenges of climate change and nature recovery.

This report is grounded in a recognition that urban character is not static - it changes over time. Cities are in constant flux, regenerating themselves inwards or expanding upwards and outwards - sometimes through gradual shifts and sometimes through rapid transformation. Through this process, London's distinctiveness can be strengthened, or diluted; the challenge is to manage change in a way that achieves the former.

We recognise that to meet ambitious housing targets, the next London Plan will need to pursue a diversified approach to densification, in the urban core and in areas of outer London, particularly in accessible, socially sustainable locations. In most places this can be best achieved through carefully considered, compact, street-based forms of development that actively strengthen their local contexts.



**The Park** within Elephant Park, Southwark



Where opportunities arise, more widespread use of mid-rise typologies (usually between 5 and 9 storeys, though context dependent) offers great potential to optimise site capacity.

In recent decades, Historic England has enabled Good Growth by:

- Engaging with the Greater London Authority in an ongoing collaboration to help shape London Plan policies on character and design.
- Supporting high density development that is sensitive to London's character and the significance of its historic places.
- Providing a robust evidence base for character-led growth via impactful research like London's Local Character and Density (2016)[1] and Complex City: London's changing character (2020).[2]

This report is the outcome of further research by Allies and Morrison for Historic England. Our hope is that it will assist the Greater London Authority, boroughs, developers and their consultants to make the most of London's character and heritage when considering opportunities for growth and change. Please note that the report does not constitute policy or guidance.



Intensification as part of Upton Village on the site of Plaistow Hospital.



The introduction of dense mid-rise typologies and the restoration of a church's setting at **Unity Place** have delivered enhancement in South Kilburn

The report explores approaches to housing development in London under the key themes of:

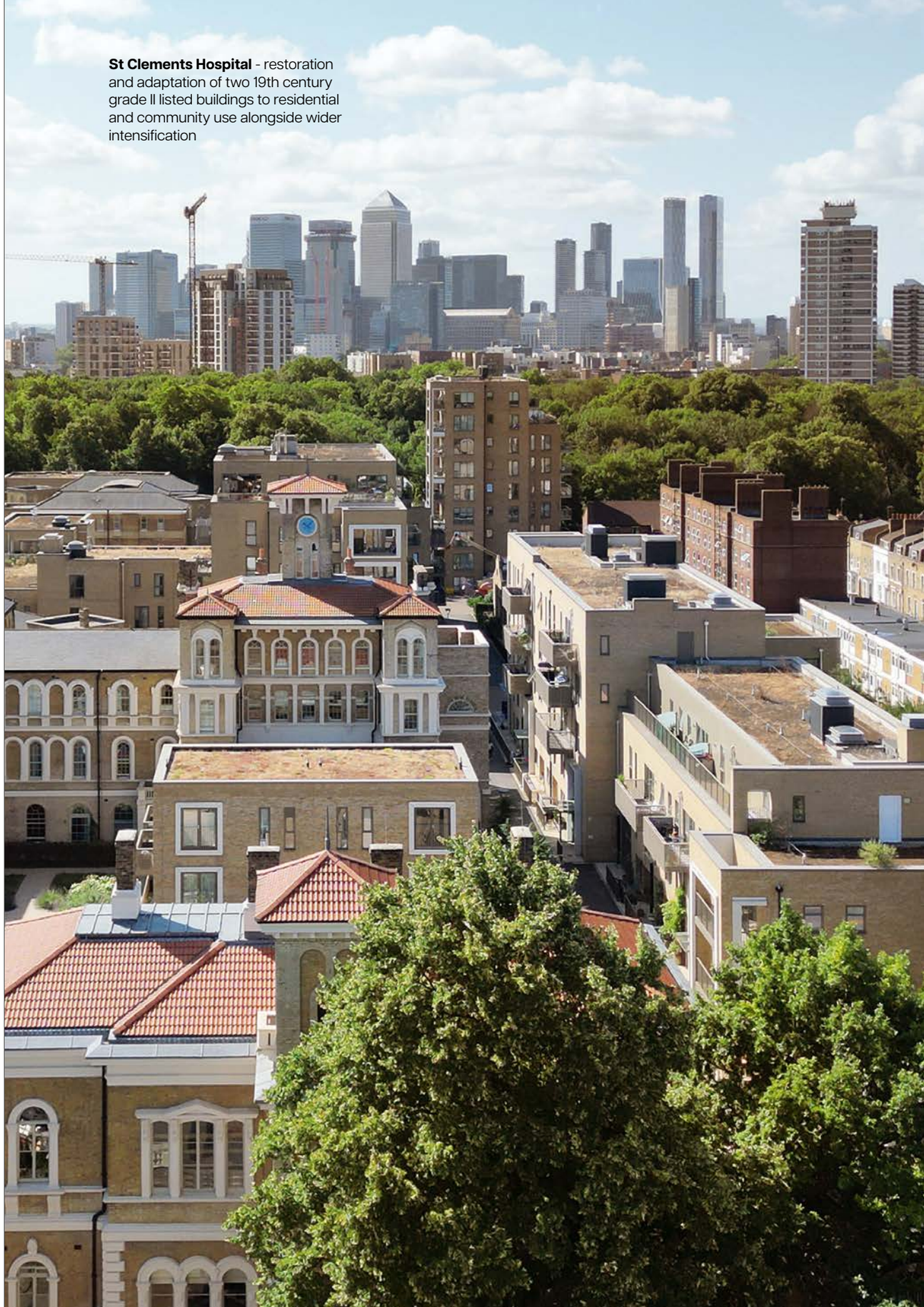
- **Adaptive re-use:** Prioritising the creative adaptation of existing buildings to embrace heritage while significantly reducing embodied carbon.
- **Sensitive intensification:** Delivering new homes in under-optimised parts of the city while creating, or sustaining, cohesive urban fabric.
- **Contextual transformation:** Championing new developments that are dense and contextual, yet remain human in scale.

These propositions are not mutually exclusive. Re-use of buildings and sites at scale can both intensify and transform an area. Similarly, widespread intensification can, over time, lead to the transformation of entire neighbourhoods.

By promoting all three approaches simultaneously, we can help to ensure that contextual approaches to housing growth are pursued across different parts of London.

Despite their differences in scale and application, all three propositions share a central premise: by embedding an understanding and appreciation of our historic environment into the next generation of housing in London, we can create better places for people. Good growth enables investment more generally in the built environment and this not only delivers new housing alongside the long-term stewardship of existing urban fabric, but also enhances the quality, character and liveability of places.

Alongside these three areas of focus, Historic England recognises that other approaches, including tall buildings, will continue to be a component of London's housing supply and evolving skyline. Historic England believes that tall buildings should be plan-led, informed by adequate evidence to ensure they are situated in the right locations and support good place-shaping. Detailed advice can be found in Historic England Advice Note 4: Tall Buildings.[3]



**St Clements Hospital** - restoration and adaptation of two 19th century grade II listed buildings to residential and community use alongside wider intensification

# The positive role of heritage

London's character and heritage act as a catalyst for Good Growth in four key ways. While these insights are rigorously evidenced, they remain less understood in contemporary planning debates where heritage is often mischaracterised as a barrier to housing delivery.



Context-led intensification at **Brentford Lock**

## Heritage is intrinsic to London's identity

Heritage is central to the city's identity - its 'London-ness'. In a broadly concentric fashion commencing with the ancient origins of the City of London, the Georgian planning of many inner areas gives way to the Victorian suburbs and expansive twentieth century outer suburbs. Across this vast area are London's archaeological deposits, its parks and open spaces, layers of industry and infrastructure, and a constellation of historic town centres.

The most successful new parts of the capital have thrived by embracing their history and cultural diversity to create distinctive, people-centred neighbourhoods. Heritage underpins local character, fostering pride, vitality, and long-term resilience. Furthermore, working within a historic context drives design innovation, pushing developers to create high-quality, site-specific projects that raise the standard of urban living.

## Working with heritage is inherently sustainable

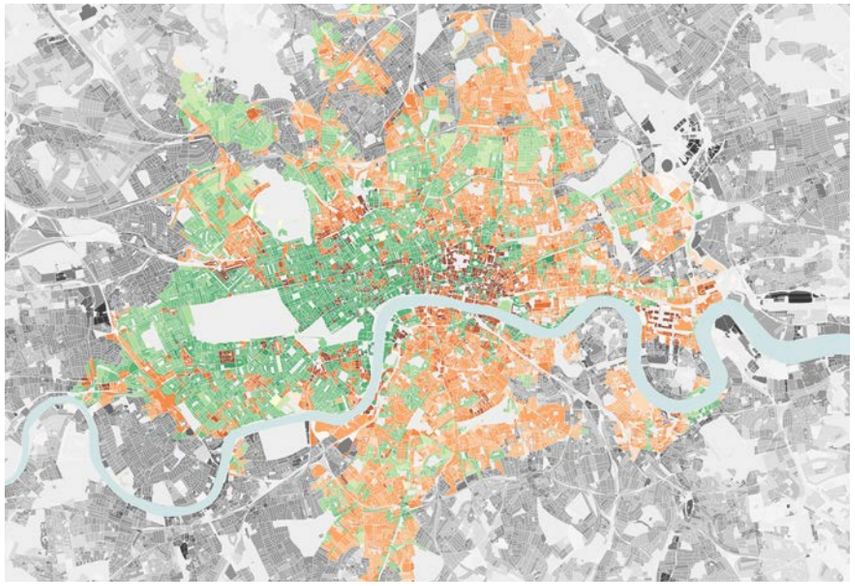
Adapting historic buildings is essential to achieving Net Zero. Because approximately 80% of the buildings that will exist in 2050 are already standing[4], we should prioritise the re-use of historic buildings and a balanced 'retrofit-first' approach to the building stock more generally. The existing built environment can be viewed as a 'carbon bank', where retaining historic fabric avoids the massive release of embodied carbon caused by demolition and new construction.



The **Ram Quarter** development celebrates its strong heritage.

**Historic England**






Map illustrating that conservation areas in inner London (shown in green) include high density areas comparable with non-designated inner London areas (shown in orange) © Allies and Morrison

## Heritage and high density are compatible

Heritage and high density are profoundly compatible[5]. At the building scale, historic typologies like mansion blocks provide high-quality, high density living that remains a benchmark for modern development.
At the neighbourhood scale, some of London's densest areas are mid-rise neighbourhoods, many of which are designated as conservation areas. In parts of inner London the historic mansion blocks, terraces and mews can exceed the density of neighbouring modern blocks. This demonstrates that historic urban grain can actively accommodate large populations without sacrificing liveability. Such areas can provide a template for future development.

## Investing in heritage bears dividends

Heritage-led regeneration delivers significant economic and social returns.

Landmark projects like King's Cross and Paternoster Square demonstrate that places with a new character robustly informed by their heritage attract global investment and long-term tenants. Research shows that 90% of people agree that investing in the historic environment improves their local area.[6] Businesses in listed buildings generate a £13k GVA premium[7], and every £10,000 of public investment leverages an average of £48,000 in private match funding.[8] This 'Heritage Dividend' provides the financial foundation for thriving, sustainable communities.



The **King's Cross** masterplan retained Victorian and industrial heritage alongside new housing

# London's historic character and density

In recent years, research by Historic England and its partners has made the case emphatically that future growth in London will be more successful if it's rooted in an understanding of the historic fabric of the city itself.[9]

The presence of the past in London's character ranges from the Roman and medieval legacy in the street patterns of the Square Mile to the terraced townhouses and verdant squares of its Georgian neighbourhoods. Key contributions of the Victorian era include grand civic infrastructure and various forms of workers' housing. Across the wider urban area, the intricate grain of former villages and market towns continues to form the core of many of London's present day centres. The twentieth century saw massive growth of the suburbs and the introduction of high-rise forms of development.

With many of London's well-loved historic neighbourhoods also being some of the densest, it makes sense to learn from the approaches to housing employed in these areas.

High density residential areas such as Marylebone, Maida Vale and Peabody estates (for example, off Blackfriars Road), have proven themselves to be both resilient and adaptable. Common features of historic neighbourhoods like these include their fine-grained, street-based urban morphology; the predominance of low and mid-rise building typologies; and the way in which they use a combination of historic housing types to build up compact and attractive neighbourhoods.

These examples illustrate how traditional block structures can deliver a diversity of unit types at high density, in combination with green infrastructure (often shared) and characterful streets. The character of these neighbourhoods is distinct, but in combination they are emblematic of London.



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The compact, well-proportioned urban morphology of inner London



Townhouses



Grand terraces



Communal gardens





**Marylebone** - compact street blocks with mansion blocks and town houses fronting streets, and mixed mews housing within blocks © Google Earth (2026)



Mansion block



Mews



Tenement housing



Shared courtyards



**Peabody Estate, Blackfriars Road** - dense perimeter blocks of brick tenement housing enclosing shared courtyards, with strong street frontages along Blackfriars Road © Google Earth (2026)

# Evolving London's historic building types

Societal and technological changes often lead to new types of housing. London itself has a rich history of housing typologies - from domestic terraces and townhouses to more collective forms of living in almshouses, mansion blocks and philanthropic dwellings. These examples share the common trait of combining to create dense, compact townscapes. Most of these historic types worked well because they could be arranged in different ways to create perimeter blocks of outward facing buildings that address streets, making for successful neighbourhoods. Estates built by the Peabody Trust and early housing associations, while sometimes more inwards looking, were of a similar scale to mansion blocks.

Some building types are better suited to specific places - like city centres, suburbs, or large regeneration sites. However, most are flexible enough to be combined into compact, street-based layouts. Today, many architects are reinventing London's historic forms of development, sometimes combining them with more recent building types such as linear blocks and towers, which shows just how resilient and adaptable these traditional forms still are.





Traditional mansions reinvented into contemporary ones at **Keybridge House**



**Smaller scale** ..... **Larger scale**



**Mews:** Moray Mews by Peter Barber, Finsbury Park



**Terraces:** Aikin Terrace by Stephen Taylor Architects, Hackney



**Villa:** Kidderpore Green by Allies and Morrison, Hampstead



**Maisonettes:** Rowan Court by Satish Jassal, Haringey



**Townhouses:** Chobham Manor by Make Architects, Stratford



**Deck access flat:** Chatto Court by Henley Halebrown, Hackney



**Parade:** Swain's Lane by Tasou Architects, Highgate



**Almshouse:** Appleby Blue by Witherford Watson Mann, Southwark



**Mansion:** Hampstead mansion block by Sergison Bates

These award-winning schemes are contemporary adaptations of historic typologies. All of them can achieve high densities in compact, mid-rise and street-based forms of development. Each is better suited to different locations as indicated.

- Central
- Urban
- Suburban
- Transformational

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# Reinforcing London’s green character

London is a green city. Landscape features, parks and open spaces play a vital role in defining the character of its neighbourhoods. Many of the parks, commons, heaths and public gardens that contribute to the quintessential character of London are important historic features. Similarly, private gardens and tree lined streets have been a key design feature for many developments historically.

The River Thames remains London’s greatest single landscape feature, a public amenity and a central component of many important views. Its tributaries, along with London’s canals and towpaths - the industrial arteries of the Victorian era - often serve as tranquil, linear open spaces. Together, these features form an extensive network of green and blue infrastructure, essential both to the city’s character and to the quality of life of its residents.



A newly animated canalside at **Kings Cross**

Access to quality open space has an important influence on people's mental and physical wellbeing in large cities. There is strong evidence linking proximity to green space, especially parks and gardens, to improved health outcomes.[10] A range of research for Historic England also identifies the importance of local historic places to people’s health and wellbeing.[11]

As many high density models of development do not provide domestic gardens for each individual dwelling (though outdoor space such as balconies is often provided), it remains essential that major new developments include sufficient high-quality open space. This provision is necessary to alleviate pressure on existing open spaces and natural amenities and to ensure that London maintains its verdant and open character.

By embedding urban greening into transformation strategies, we can ensure that new housing developments contribute to a more resilient, healthy, and contextually grounded city.

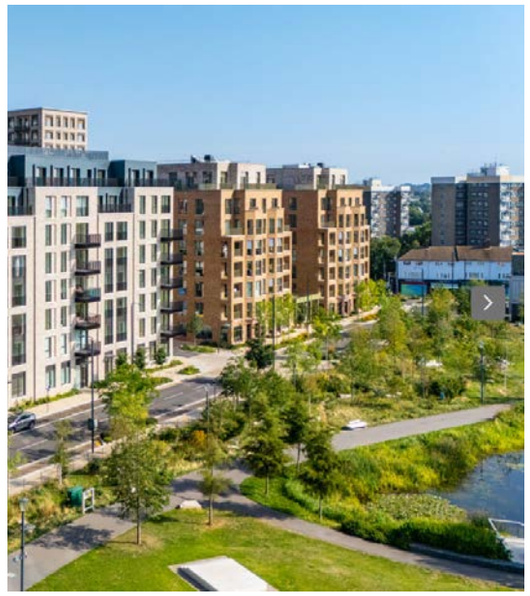




New development comfortably nestled within the hilly landscape at **Woodside Square**

**47% of Greater London's land area is classified as green space.**

**Designated Public Open Space makes up nearly 20% of London's total land area.**[12]



A major new park delivered as part of the transformation at **Brent Cross Town**



Generous provision of private outdoor amenity for residents at **Woodside Square**



Front gardens facing soft landscaping and tree-lined streets at **South Gardens, Elephant Park**

# ADAPTIVE RE-USE

## The benefits of re-using historic buildings for housing

The re-use of existing buildings is an important strategy for delivering new homes because it directly engages with the historic fabric of London. As economic and societal shifts continue to reshape the city, many non-residential buildings no longer serve their original functions, leading some to become vacant or even derelict. Many of these buildings make a positive contribution to the character of London's neighbourhoods. They can serve as both 'carbon banks', helping London progress on the path towards Net Zero, and adaptable infrastructure, providing for new housing, jobs and services.

With the right knowledge and design expertise, many of these buildings - whether or not formally listed for their historic interest - can be creatively re-purposed to deliver unique, characterful homes at the heart of established communities. Breathing a second or even third life into historic buildings ensures they continue to play a vital role in the social, environmental, and economic sustainability of neighbourhoods.

Beyond their internal capacity for residential conversion, historic buildings, and streets and open spaces associated with historic patterns of development, can provide vital design cues for new development. Historic buildings are fundamental components of the local townscape that contribute to the distinct identity of a place. They act as anchors that help bridge London's past and future character, ensuring that growth feels rooted in its context rather than detached from it.



**Newcourt St** (St John's Wood police station)



**Centre Point** office tower conversion



Fitzrovia Chapel at the heart of **Fitzroy Place**



**Hornsey Town Hall** revitalised through community uses and linked residential development






**St Clement's Hospital** conversion and extension



**Woodside Square** retrofit and infill

Within this section historic buildings are defined broadly, allowing consideration of listed or locally listed buildings, those located within conservation areas, and other buildings of 'traditional' construction (typically built by 1919). The analysis also looks beyond these categories to consider some creative, character-led approaches to conversion of later twentieth century buildings.

We can make the most of opportunities for adaptive re-use in London by:

- Promoting the benefits of re-using historic buildings for housing.
- Understanding the suitability of historic building types for adaptive re-use.
- Pursuing a balanced approach to retrofit-first, in which buildings are retained, adapted and potentially extended while having regard to townscape and heritage considerations.
- Highlighting resources to help public bodies and private developers make the most of these opportunities.
- Showcasing successful examples of adaptive re-use in London.
- Supporting efforts to better understand London's hidden housing capacity.

# Understanding the suitability of historic building types for adaptive re-use

Every building was designed for a purpose. Warehouses have large floorplates and high ceilings to support the movement of goods internally, while schools are built around corridors and regularly sized classrooms. Homes are designed around the more compact needs of households of various sizes, and they need to feel both intimate and spacious.

Turning a building designed for the needs of a workforce or particular function into a home or homes is not always straightforward. However, there are many non-residential buildings which have the right dimensions and characteristics to allow successful conversion.

Indeed, there are some great examples of historic buildings which have proven immensely adaptable to multiple uses including as homes. A significant proportion of London's remaining Victorian warehouses, for example, have been re-used and converted.

Today, some of the common building types with scope for conversion are likely to include service buildings such as banks, the space above these and other high street shops, workspaces such as office blocks, and redundant historic school buildings. The illustrations on the page adjacent are examples of completed schemes.



**Less intervention required** ..... **More intervention required**

- More regular internal layout
- More suitable floor to floor heights

- Variable and high floor to floor heights
- Larger building depths
- More complex daylight and ventilation strategies required



**Banks:** The Old Bank House, Hertfordshire



**Colleges:** 1 Prince of Wales Road, Kentish Town



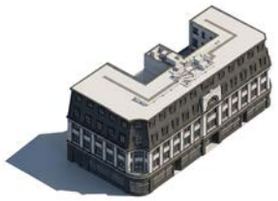
**Churches:** Steeple Court, Bethnal Green



**Schools:** Minstrel Court on Teesdale Close, Bethnal Green



**Police stations:** Former Allerton Fire and Police Station, Liverpool



**Department stores:** Ivor House, Brixton



**Town halls:** Acton Town Hall Apartments



**Fire stations:** Belsize Park Fire Station



**Cinemas:** Lumiere Apartments, Clapham



**Warehouses:** Hanover House, Bradford



**Bath and washhouses:** Prince of Wales Baths, Kentish Town



**Leisure facilities:** Former Highbury Stadium, Highbury Square

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# Key considerations and resources for adapting historic buildings

Planning policies at both national and local level are shifting to place a greater emphasis on the re-use of existing buildings and resources. The need, and opportunity, to adapt and 'retrofit' buildings in response to climate change is also gaining widespread recognition.

Bringing a building back into use should have a positive impact on the character and vibrancy of the area. But within that simple statement is a myriad of design and use decisions that determine the impact on the streetscape, the quality of place and the social and economic success of the neighbourhood.

For any conversion to residential, achieving a positive impact overall will be influenced by a series of planning considerations. These include the ability to support the uplift in community and social infrastructure required, the scope to provide adequate private, communal or public green space, and the match with local housing needs in the area.

For some vacant buildings, residential use won't be right and it will be a priority to find a viable use that can breathe new life into the building.  Retaining buildings for health centres, community facilities and schools can support new residential development as part of integrated schemes.

For other vacant buildings, while it may be important for the ground floor to contain active uses that enliven the street, the upper floors can be successfully adapted to housing.

A sensitive scheme organises and accommodates the new uses in a way that is consistent with the heritage significance of the buildings and ensures a positive impact on the surrounding context.

## Advice and guidance

When considering the conversion of a vacant or underused historic building, Historic England offers a wealth of planning and technical advice, including many publications available online.[13] Where heritage assets are concerned, such as listed buildings or conservation areas, it is important to understand the 'significance' of the assets affected so that this can inform both design and decision-making. Historic England also offers constructive pre-application advice on schemes.

Other online resources include Heritage Works for Housing 2024, which provides detailed guidance on transforming historic buildings for residential use, and the Heritage Investment Prospectus, which identifies underused heritage assets and connects owners with investors to support their sensitive redevelopment, re-use, and sustainable regeneration.



The sensitive refurbishment and extension of the **Thrale Almshouses**, a group of eight locally listed one-bedroom almshouses in Streatham, was delivered alongside two new-build affordable housing blocks, creating a perimeter block and a stronger frontage to the street.



Some suggested key considerations when establishing the suitability of larger buildings for conversion into multiple flats:

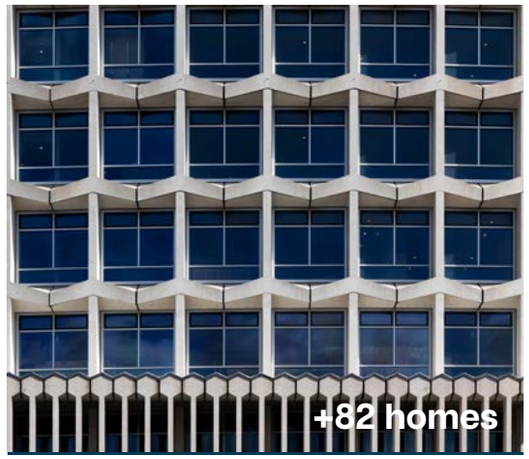
1. **Understanding and celebrating the character and 'significance' of the building and its setting**
2. **Testing key residential parameters for larger buildings:**
   - Building depth under 18m
   - Floor to ceiling heights of at least 2.5m
   - Central core capacity to facilitate fire-fighting standards and riser requirements
   - Understand original construction constraints and opportunities for different eras of building
   - Scope for the ground floor uses to support positive interaction with the street
3. **Feasibility assessment - risks and opportunities**
4. **High-level viability review**



The conversion of the grade II listed **Enterprise House** in Hayes, as part of the wider Old Vinyl Factory scheme, includes new residential accommodation with ground floor commercial uses.

# Examples of adaptive re-use to create new homes for Londoners

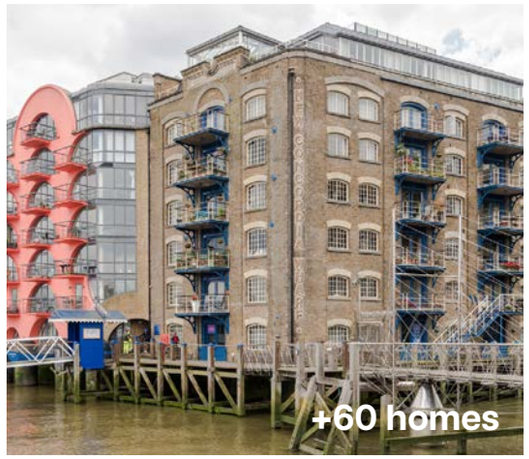
**Internal conversions:**
with internal reconfiguration many existing buildings provide ready-made infrastructure for new homes, with the best examples fully embracing original design features and idiosyncrasies to make characterful apartments



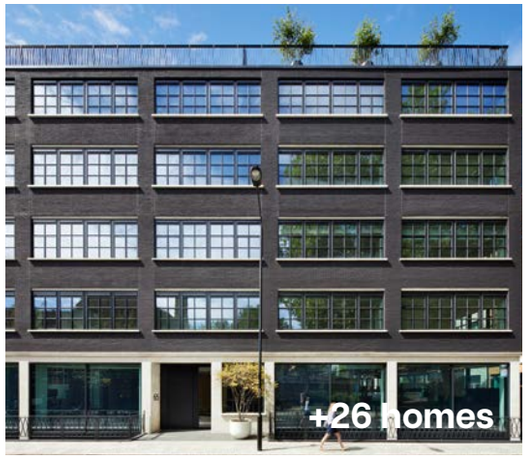

**Centre Point** - the conversion of an office block into homes, workspace and amenities




**Prince of Wales Road** - the conversion of this polytechnic building to apartments enabled an intensive re-use of the structure around existing courtyards



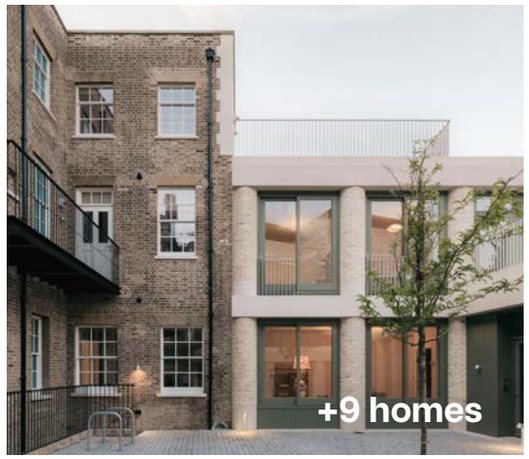

**New Concordia Wharf** - this Thameside warehouse is a classic example of conversion which sensitively introduces balcony spaces



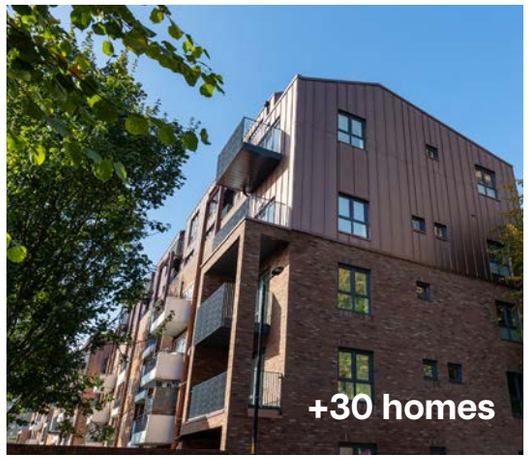

**Asta House** - re-use of 1950s light industrial structures like this need non-residential uses to fill the ground floor



**Extended enhancement:**
to support high quality living environments some re-use schemes will need extensions; these can support the creation of private amenity space or communal courtyards, as well as aid internal configurations and daylight capture



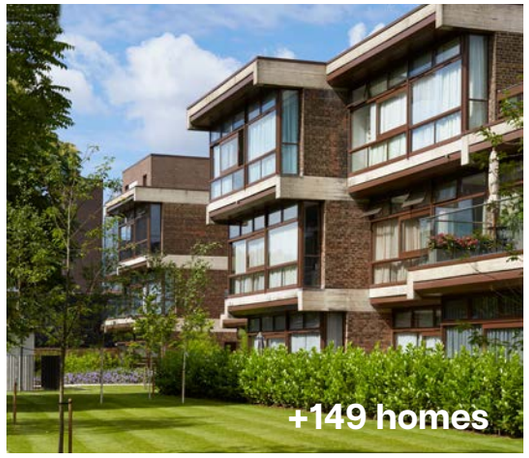

**St John's Wood Police Station** - an extension was introduced to wrap around and create a courtyard space within the plot




**Antony House and Roderick House, Bermondsey** - an innovative two storey extension provides additional homes and retrofit of amenities with minimal disruption




**St. Clements Hospital** - a detailed study of existing buildings helped inform re-use options as well as the design of new build infill




**Baylis Old School** - the adaptive re-use and extension of a landmark, grade II listed modernist school in Lambeth, preserving its architectural character while creating new homes around a series of interconnected courtyards

**Trace on Drummond Street** by Bureau de Change represents a 'deep retrofit' approach, retaining and reworking the existing 1980s structure while introducing a distinctive façade that reimagines the building while responding to its context



Before

+5 homes

## Transformed envelopes:

everyday buildings can be retrofitted to become heritage informed landmarks that act to both repair and enhance the streetscape character, meaning previously underappreciated buildings pivot to become local gems



Before



**8 Bleeding Heart Yard** - the re-use of a 1970s office block has ingeniously created a new landmark that re-imagines the Victorian history of site




**Zodiac House and Zodiac Court** - the re-use of the lower four-storey 1960s office block has revealed the beauty of the original design and supported a much more active frontage to an enhanced public space

# Exploring London’s hidden housing capacity

Residential floorspace in well-connected parts of London comes at a premium, yet underused space exists plentifully in plain sight. Recent research suggests that London’s historic buildings hold substantial, untapped potential to unlock new housing. The precise nature and scale of this potential is unclear but recent vacancy data suggest significant capacity:

- There are around 80,000 vacant historic dwellings in London (built pre-1919).[14]
- More than 11,000 commercial units in London have been vacant for over two years - a total floorspace equivalent to 11 times that of Westfield London.[15]
- Repurposing redundant commercial spaces, including secondary offices and retail, could theoretically create up to 40,000 new homes as a high-level estimate, and subject to suitability and viability.[16]

The appropriate use for a building will of course depend on its location, and other planning and market factors, as well as its adaptability. We are operating in an increasingly data-rich landscape where more targeted and detailed analyses of key factors such as location, building type, building depth, floor-to-ceiling heights, structural grids and energy performance could help to identify the re-use potential of existing areas. Further research may help to unlock the latent potential of different historic building types, such as underused space above retail shops.



The **Bourne Estate** regeneration in Camden sensitively extends the original Edwardian layout, using brickwork, aligned five-storey massing, and courtyard-focused design to reinterpret its historic character while increasing residential density.

# SENSITIVE INTENSIFICATION

## Emerging policy and practice

Context-led intensification represents an approach to increasing residential density that balances the demand for new housing with a considered response to a neighbourhood's character and heritage. Historic England has a record of advocating for the sensitive intensification of historic places in London. Over the last decade, the case for growth informed by local character has been evidenced through a number of research projects, helping to embed these ideas in the London Plan.

Historic England's role extends beyond policy influence to providing expert advice to local planning authorities and developers on applications affecting significant heritage assets, such as listed buildings, scheduled monuments, and conservation areas.

Much of this work has focused on areas with a concentration of heritage assets, often in parts of central and inner London. However, as many of the 'easy' infill and intensification opportunities in these areas have been largely exhausted, the demand for intensification has increasingly shifted towards parts of outer London. Typical forms of intensification include the upward and outward extension of suburban semis, new residential units in rear gardens, and the redevelopment of amalgamated suburban plots.

Concurrently, national planning policy is placing a greater emphasis on 'optimising' density and making more effective use of land, with a potential move towards encouraging householders and house builders to intensify residential plots. This presents both opportunities and risks, not just for those areas of recognised historic value, but also for the character of a wider range of London's neighbourhoods. It is a critical moment for those planning at London-wide, borough and neighbourhood level to put in place the frameworks needed to ensure that future growth contributes to cohesive townscapes and successful neighbourhoods.



Estate intensification has been achieved through the retrofit and extension of existing **Antony House and Roderick House** in Bermondsey to provide 30 new affordable homes

This report promotes a sensitive approach to the intensification of London's neighbourhoods by:

- Promoting an evidence-based approach to intensification, informed by characterisation studies and conservation area character appraisals, to ensure that new development is informed by a robust understanding of the place.
- Exploring common opportunities for small-scale interventions that together can deliver 'extensive' intensification.
- Considering mechanisms for promoting sensitive intensification, ensuring that individual schemes contribute to cohesive townscapes, while protecting sites and areas that are designated for their special architectural or historic interest.
- Highlighting successful examples of intensification of a range of types and scales.



The **Barts Square** scheme carefully stitches contemporary housing into the historic fabric of Smithfield, using scale, materiality, and urban grain to reinforce the character of surrounding heritage assets



The **Mildmay complex**, within the Hackney Road Conservation Area in Shoreditch, integrates new housing alongside the Shoreditch Tabernacle Baptist Church and the Mildmay Mission Hospital

# An evidence-based approach to small sites and intensification

There has been an increasing focus on small sites as an opportunity for new housing since the adoption of the last London Plan. The scope to repair and enhance local character in association with small site interventions is extensive. This might be through repairing gaps in frontage, upward extensions (in appropriate circumstances) or resolving front and back relationships on residential estates, while also taking opportunities to introduce street greening as part of new build development.

Much design energy has been directed towards small sites over recent years. Often heavily constrained, small sites frequently generate creative solutions and unconventional designs. Smaller architectural practices have brought forward ingenious responses to deliver high quality homes in some of the most challenging sites.



**William Street Quarter** introduces historically informed typologies such as mews houses

The Greater London Authority's Small Site Design Codes London Plan Guidance[17] promotes the use of design codes to achieve incremental intensification on small sites. According to this guidance, area-based approaches should be informed by characterisation studies that assess, describe and map the distinct characteristics of London's places to identify 'character types'. Studies should also identify the sensitivity of different areas to change. Those areas containing heritage assets, such as listed buildings and conservation areas, are likely to be particularly sensitive.



Infill development at **York Way Estate** has transformed the estate's relationship to surrounding streets





**Highgate Newtown Community Centre** - the scheme stitches together two neighbourhoods by opening up a new pedestrian route through the site © Google Earth 2026



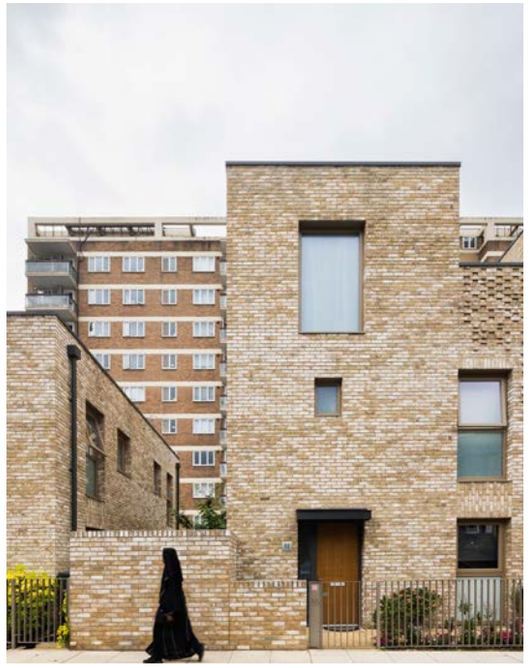
**Highgate Newtown Community Centre** Partners development

London boroughs have invested in both the identification of small sites and the production of design work to support their development, but the uptake of character-led approaches to intensification has not been comprehensive.

As the search for opportunities for intensification shifts towards the suburbs, it is increasingly important that development is informed by a robust understanding of local character and context. This will help to ensure that anticipated growth works with local character, conserving and enhancing positive elements while allowing flexibility for change.

Communities should be involved when devising approaches to small sites, to ensure that these take account of the amenities enjoyed by local residents. For example, understanding the overall urban greening level in a neighbourhood can help to ensure that the approach to small sites balances the amenity and climate resilience of the neighbourhood with new development.

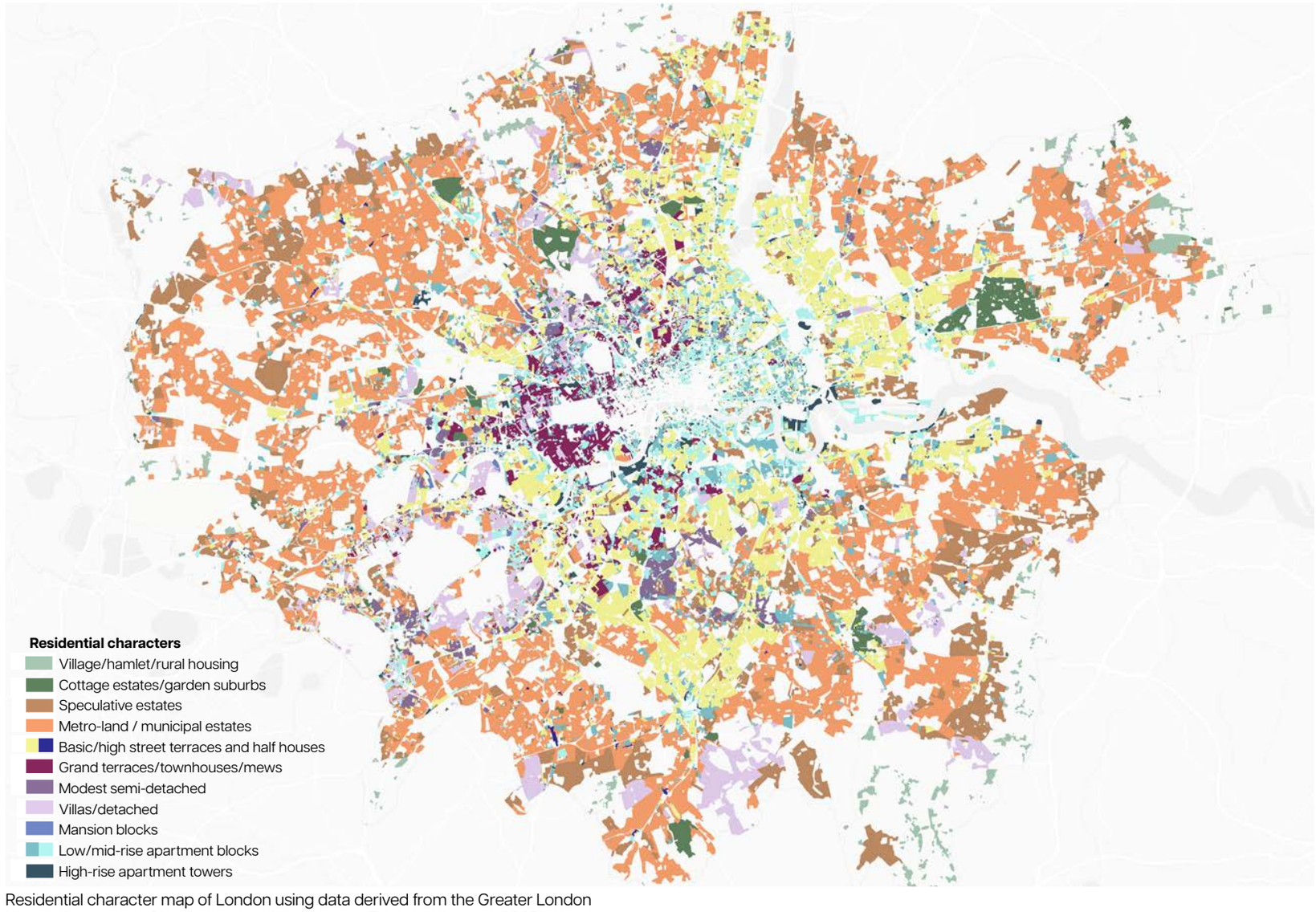
In relation to conservation areas, to ensure that their special character is conserved while also identifying opportunities for enhancement, it will be important that boroughs maintain up-to-date conservation area appraisals and management plans.



Community-backed infill development at **Dover Court Estate**

# London's diverse character requires nuanced design guidance

London's neighbourhoods exhibit great variation in character. Even within London's suburban areas the character ranges significantly, primarily as a result of their history and evolution. A one size fits all approach to suburban intensification is therefore unlikely to be appropriate; rather, a more nuanced character-led approach should be adopted. The map illustrates the diversity of residential types and characters, drawing on the data in Historic England's Greater London Historic Landscape Characterisation Map (January 2025).




Residential character map of London using data derived from the Greater London Historic Landscape Characterisation Map (Historic England, January 2025)

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Examples of various residential characters in London, alongside completed schemes in similar contexts



**Victorian/Edwardian railway suburbs**



House in East Dulwich



**Arts and Crafts / Garden suburbs**



Heath House



**Inter-war 'Metro-land'**



House in Clapham



**Cottage estates**



Becontree Avenue



**Post-war modernist estates**



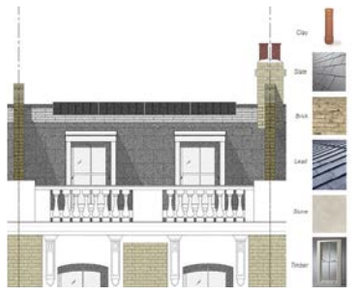
Dover Court Estate

# Mechanisms for promoting sensitive intensification

Small sites and intensification have not achieved their full potential as an approach to delivering new homes in London. To address this challenge, it is hoped by policy makers that the introduction of model design codes for small sites will provide greater certainty on the form and scale of development that will be considered acceptable.

Certainly, design codes can introduce clear parameters for developers to work within.  However, they should be narrow enough in scope to avoid promoting generic design or discouraging either creativity or a sympathetic response to local character.

A single suburban code risks flattening the diverse identities found across the capital. Historic England advocates for a 'family' of bespoke model codes (where appropriate) for the distinct building typologies and area types identified across London, potentially founded on a minimum set of universal national requirements, but informed by specific local contexts. More flexible guidance can suggest the ways in which designs can respond to local character. The need for bespoke approaches applies more emphatically to conservation areas.



The Redcliffe Road Local Development Order Design Guide is a successful example of an LDO enabling the intensification of a Georgian street in west London. © 2023 Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. All rights reserved

Generic model codes may often be unsuitable for these protected environments because such codes only mandate a limited set of design outcomes. Greater flexibility will be needed to ensure Councils can fulfil their statutory duty to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the conservation area. This necessitates more sophisticated, context-specific guidance, informed by the interplay of the history, materiality, and urban grain of a neighbourhood and the specific buildings and spaces within it.

Other heritage assets such as listed buildings will need to be excluded from generic model codes, but may also be the subject of bespoke approaches to intensification.

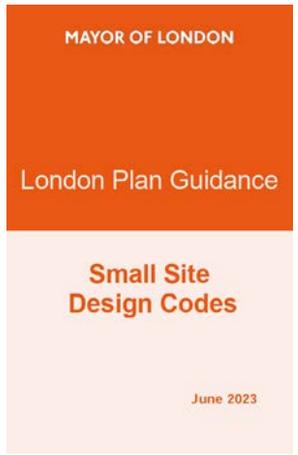
## Simplified planning tools

There are a number of planning tools that could be used, alongside the evidence and policy approaches outlined in this section, to fast-track housing development by providing up-front consent for site-specific intensification. Such mechanisms include Local Development Orders, Neighbourhood Development Orders, and Street Vote Development Orders (subject to secondary legislation). These remain little used tools and their effectiveness as a means of promoting sensitive intensification is not yet fully understood.

## Sensitive intensification in historic contexts

There are several bespoke and highly localised approaches to coordinated intensification in conservation areas in London, which may provide inspiration for similar initiatives. These approaches are more likely to be possible in those conservation areas (or specific streets within them) that exhibit a high degree of architectural uniformity and contain standard building typologies such as double pile townhouses with hidden valley roofs. Opportunities can be identified through the process of preparing and updating a borough's conservation area character appraisals and management plans (for which councils have an associated statutory duty).

Current approaches include the Local Development Order for numbers 21-32 Redcliffe Road in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. The Order itself removes the need for planning permission to be obtained for mansard roof extensions within certain parameters. An accompanying Design Guide aims to ensure that detailed design is sympathetic to the architecture and historic character of the buildings, which are located within the Boltons Conservation Area.




The Greater London Authority's Small Sites Design Codes LPG provides useful guidance on the spatial and physical design parameters for small site development. This could be further strengthened by providing examples of how practitioners have successfully worked with heritage and reflected local character via a design-led approach. © Greater London Authority

In Tower Hamlets, the council has adopted design guides for mansard roof extensions in five conservation areas. This guidance gives a steer on the appropriate design for this type of intensification, providing greater certainty to householders and developers when considering making applications for planning consent.

The illustrations on these pages show how, at the most basic level, intensification may occur along a street. Design tools such as design guidance and codes can help to steer these incremental changes towards positive outcomes.

Where variety of architectural forms and articulation of rooflines contribute to the character and significance of an area, the common interventions are less likely to be appropriate.

**Common interventions for extensive suburban intensification**

1 Redevelopment of a single lower density typology into a low to mid rise apartment, repairing the rhythm of the street.
2 Conversion of large single units into semi detached housing, which could then be subdivided into apartments with upward extensions.
3 End of row development responding to the increased scale of its context and corner plot prominence, repairing the rhythm of the street.



**Purley Downs Road** is an attractive example of suburban intensification



**Kidderpore Green** involved the conversion of houses into apartments



Example of an existing suburban street



Modest intensification - when some potential opportunities along the street have been developed




Extensive intensification - when the full development potential of the site / street has been optimised



**Common interventions for extensive urban intensification**

1 Extending the original terrace (potentially with a more compact form that can fit four homes in the space of three).
2 Slender infill development in gap sites.
3 End of row infill terrace with a bookend addition to drop the scale to the surrounding context.
4 Potential for an upward extension, depending on context, stepped back or sloped from the road to reduce its visibility from the street.



**Aikin Terrace** extends a historic terrace in Stoke Newington



Varied rooflines and frontages on **Langham Street**, Fitzrovia, located within a conservation area



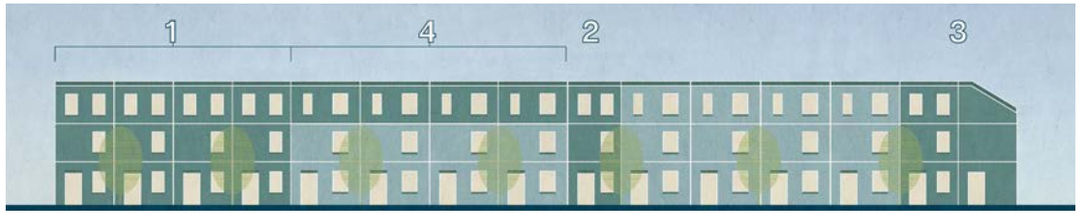
**Slim House** in Clapham occupies a narrow plot



Example of an existing urban street



Modest intensification - when some potential opportunities along the street have been developed




Extensive intensification - when the full development potential of the site / street has been optimised

# Extensive intensification

Approaches to intensification emerge from commonly occurring site conditions including:

- Augmenting local shopping parades
- Reclaiming land along arterial roads.
- Enhancing residential estates
- Densifying suburbia through incremental intensification:
  - Subdivision (or extension and subdivision) of houses into flats
  - Single plot development: Backland
  - Single plot development: Redevelopment
  - Combined plot: Backland
  - Combined plot: Redevelopment
- Infill development

When small-scale interventions are delivered incrementally across a wide area, their cumulative impact can be significant. If this occurs in an uncoordinated manner, it risks the gradual erosion of local character and amenity.

While some places may possess the diversity of character and resilience to accommodate this growth, residential neighbourhoods with a more consistent character are likely to be more sensitive to these changes, as are conservation areas.

Local planning authorities need to ensure that robust design policies are supported by appropriate design guidance and codes, to deliver both uplifts in density and attractive neighbourhoods. For example:

- Setting clear parameters on acceptable building heights and bulk to contain growth through design codes.
- Providing a steer on the outward appearance of development through design guidance, to promote visual harmony without inhibiting innovative, contextual design.



## Augmenting local parades



Intensification of end of terrace unit at **312 Hackney Road**.



Redevelopment at a prominent junction on **Swains Lane** in Highgate.



This co-living parade responds to the rich and varied character of **174 Rye Lane**, forming a contemporary response to its architectural heritage.



Proposed **Parade Housing** has a stepped form which reflects the character of an adjacent church, and addresses constraints set by the neighbouring properties.

## Reclaiming land along arterial roads



**Edgewood Mews** on North Circular Road, a new urban block arranged around a pedestrianised street.



**Kidderpore Green** on Finchley Road combines adaptive re-use, subdivision and new build for new community space and homes of mixed size and tenure in a conservation area setting.



**95 Peckham Road -** A contemporary reinterpretation of a tenement style mansion block provides stepped back of pavement frontage to Peckham Road.

## Enhancing residential estates



New additions respond to existing buildings at **Bourne Estate**.



**Agar Grove Estate** redevelopment takes inspiration from the built context of the area including terraces, villas and mansion blocks facing public spaces.



Re-establishing a historic street and celebrating the grade I listed St Augustine's Church at **Unity Place**.

## Subdivision of houses into flats



Four Arts and Crafts houses were refurbished and converted into apartments, whilst also improving energy performance at **Kidderpore Green**.

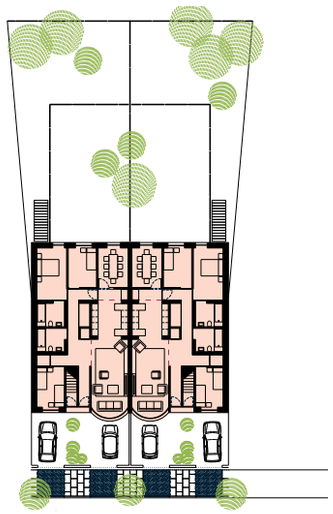


Illustration of the potential subdivision of original semi-detached pair into four separate units each with a garden.

## Single plot development: backland



The **Angle House** in Tottenham is an efficient response to common constraints.



The faceted shape of **Idlewild Mews** in South Croydon ensures that windows and terraces are angled away from neighbouring houses while providing amenity for residents.

## Single plot development: redevelopment



Completing a terrace corner at **Lucien Road**.



Restoring the building line at **Calais Street**.



A contemporary nod to the Arts and Crafts movement, the **Purley Downs Road** development reflects the rhythm of the surrounding suburban context.



## Combined plot: backland



**Copper Lane** introduces six homes embracing communality with shared gardens and facilities.



**Moray Mews** in Finsbury Park introduces eight courtyard houses.



**Moore Park Mews** is a careful intensification at the centre of a dense urban block, balancing privacy and good natural light.

## Combined plot: redevelopment



**Becontree Avenue** delivers greater density rooted in local character.



Completing the edge of the historic **Nunhead Green.**



**Ely Court** replaces post-war slab blocks re-establishing the historic urban grain of the area and referencing 19th Century mansion blocks.

## New infill development



Delivering net-zero infill at **Hermitage Mews.**

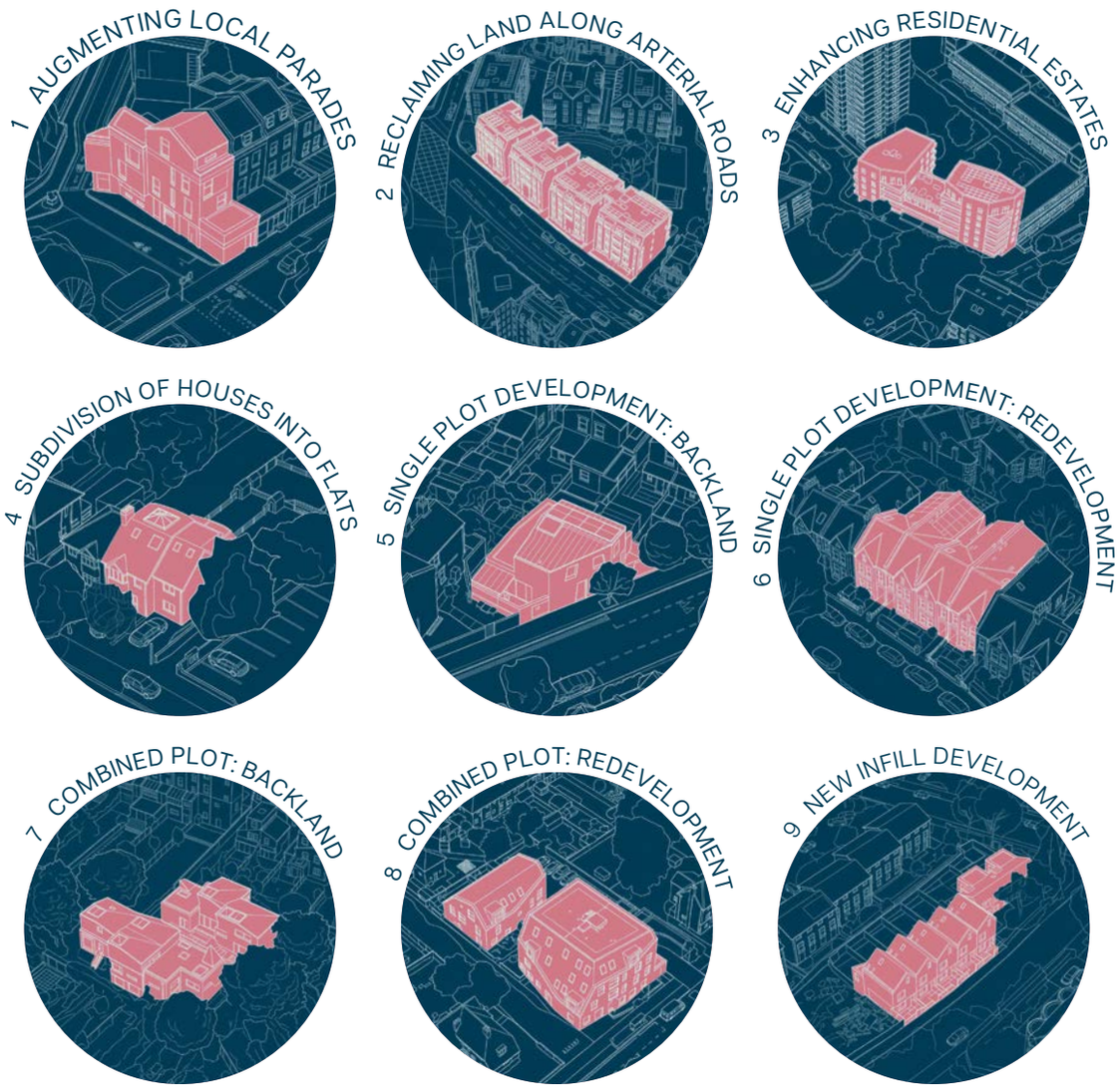


**Charlie Ratchford Court** draws on the scale and proportions of its Victorian neighbours.



**Hafer Road** replaces a post-war bomb site infill with 15 homes designed through a unique collaboration with the original residents.

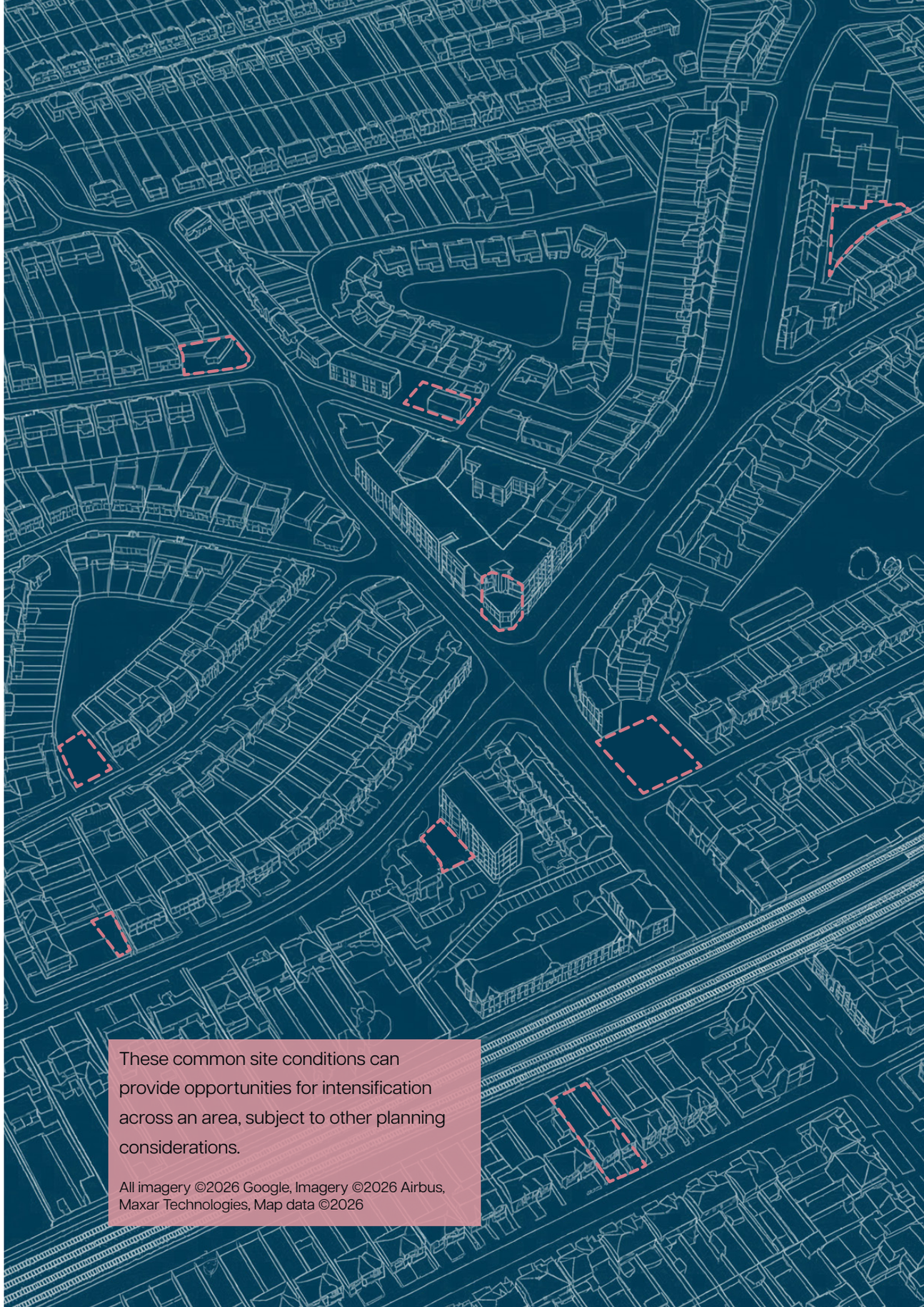
## Types of intensification




## Completed scheme examples

1 Intensification of end of terrace unit on Hackney Road, Cuozzo Company
2 Kidderpore Green, Finchley Road, by Allies and Morrison
3 Community-led infill at Marklake Court, Bell Phillips Architects
4 Conversion of Cambridge semi-detached home into two flats, Lynwood Associates
5 Angle House, Tottenham, Carbogno Ceneda Architects
6 Restoring the building line, Calais Street, PRP
7 Copper Lane, Henley Halebrown Architects
8 Becontree Avenue, Archio
9 Hermitage Mews, Gbolade Design Studio

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These common site conditions can provide opportunities for intensification across an area, subject to other planning considerations.

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# CONTEXTUAL TRANSFORMATION

## London’s changing character

London has witnessed significant growth in recent decades, evolving incrementally in some areas and changing beyond recognition in others. Many sites that were out of sight or out of bounds for the ordinary Londoner have been redeveloped or renewed, made accessible, and brought into the fold of city life.

Many of London’s large-scale opportunities for growth and change - like many post-industrial cities - are associated with reclamation. This involves the repurposing of areas that were previously reserved for specific land uses such as infrastructure, light industry, docks and waste handling, which are no longer required for those purposes.

There are also opportunities to repair and enhance the urban fabric. For example, some existing building complexes have capacity to be repurposed while accommodating significant infill development in a way that makes them more connected, outward-facing, and attractive places for Londoners to live and work.

By drawing inspiration from London's high density historic neighbourhoods and enduring building typologies, large sites and areas identified for transformational change can evolve into successful new places that accommodate high densities while remaining liveable and distinct.

These areas offer the greatest opportunity for a mixture of uses, high quality public spaces and mid-rise forms of development as a major component of positive place-shaping. A range of building typologies arranged in street-based layouts can support active frontages, walkability, and a strong sense of place. In this way, London’s new neighbourhoods can build on its distinctive character and identity.





New buildings create a positive relationship with the enhanced canalside at **Brentford Lock**

Historic England promotes a contextual approach to the transformation of large sites, drawing on the core strands of London’s existing character outlined in the introductory chapters of this report:

- Learning from London’s historic places to inform high quality new design.
- Evolving historic building types while encouraging design innovation to meet contemporary living needs.
- Reinforcing London’s green character by ensuring new, dense forms of urbanism respect the green character of the city.
- Drawing on evidence about the context, character and heritage of a site.
- Highlighting successful approaches to: repairing and enhancing the urban fabric; introducing a distinctive new character; understanding how to work with isolated sites; and dealing with transitions in character.



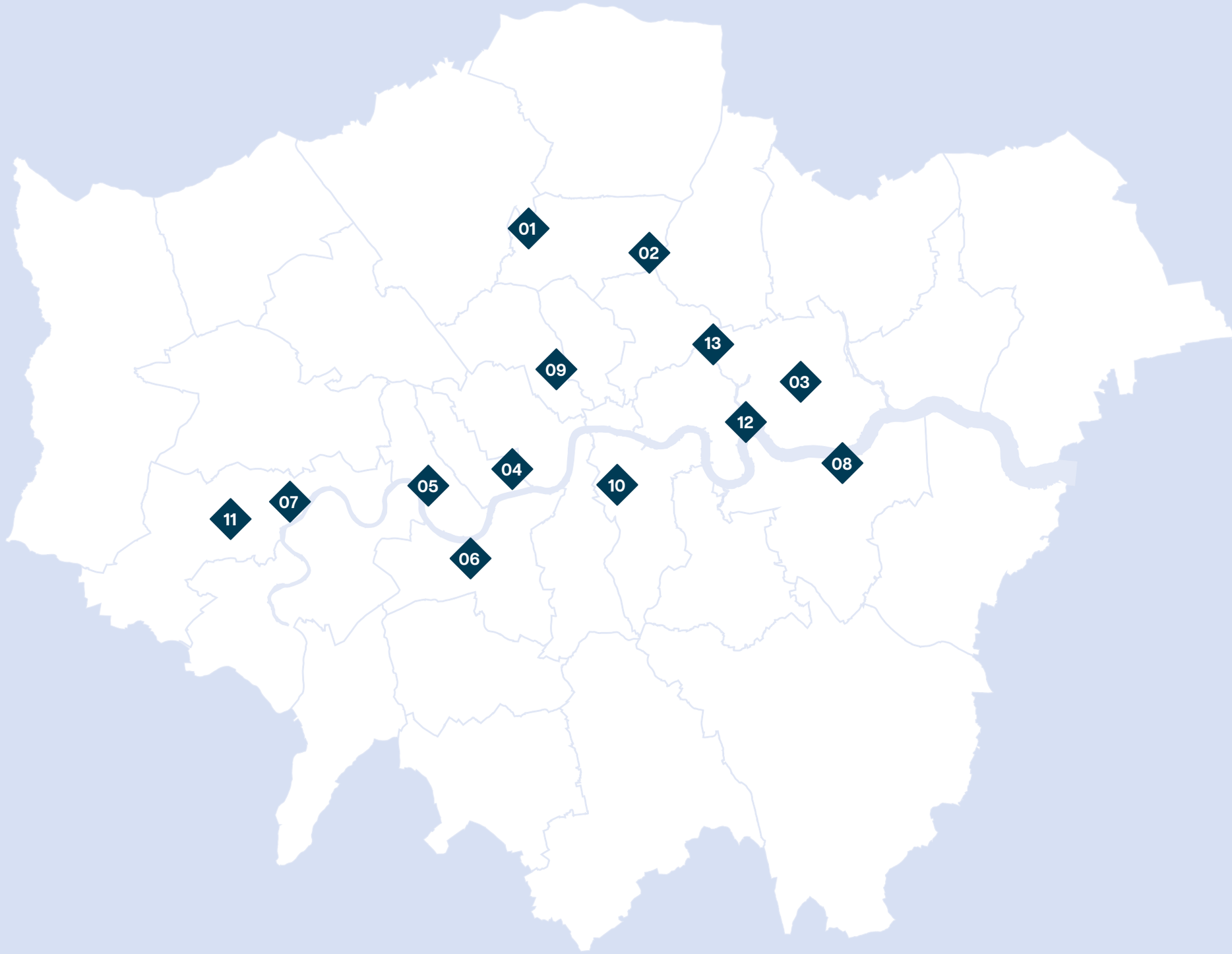
Mid-rise buildings provide a backdrop to everyday life at **Lampton Road**




Layering of historic and new development at **Goodluck Hope**

## Location of developments featured in this section

- 01 Woodside Square - LB Haringey
- 02 Hale Wharf - LB Haringey
- 03 Upton Village - LB Newham
- 04 Chelsea Barracks - RB Kensington and Chelsea
- 05 Chiswick Gate - LB Hounslow
- 06 Ram Quarter - LB Wandsworth
- 07 Brentford Lock West - LB Hounslow
- 08 Woolwich Arsenal - LB Greenwich
- 09 King's Cross - LB Camden
- 10 South Gardens - LB Southwark
- 11 Lampton Road - LB Hounslow
- 12 Goodluck Hope - LB Tower Hamlets
- 13 The Wallis, Hackney Wick / Fish Island - London Legacy Development Corporation




London-wide illustrative map plotting the development projects illustrated in the transformation section

# The importance of evidence on context, character and heritage

A central premise of the government's planning policy for design is that local policies should be developed with communities and grounded in an understanding and evaluation of an area's defining characteristics. When considering opportunities for large-scale change, it will also be important that the design approach is founded on a vision for the place and a strategic framework such as a masterplan. This will help to ensure that future development both integrates with and enhances the site and its surroundings.

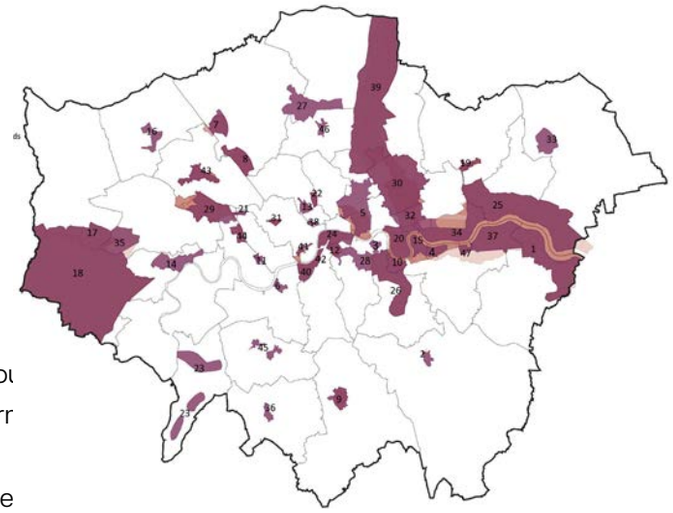
Transformational change can involve the regeneration of vast swathes of land within Opportunity Areas, or the re-shaping of modest 'pieces of city' through masterplans for strategic sites. In future it could include the creation of 'New Towns' in the government's preferred locations. Conversely it could be the result of gradual intensification of existing neighbourhoods, as discussed in the preceding chapter. It could also include the development of land released from the Green Belt, following strategic Green Belt reviews. Whatever the scale and nature of change, a successful new neighbourhood is most likely to be achieved when development is informed by robust evidence about the context and character of a place.

As housing delivery progresses across London's Opportunity Areas, the primary opportunities for growth are shifting towards locally identified 'transform' areas. Defining these areas involves a process, guided by the Greater London Authority, in which local planning authorities undertake characterisation studies to determine the 'capacity for change' of their areas.



Transformation areas identified by Local Planning Authorities are typically found in low density areas such as big box retail (top), light industrial sites (middle) or in and around town centres (bottom).
© Google Earth (2026)





London Plan 2021 Opportunity Areas
© Greater London Authority

This includes identifying parts of a borou to be conserved, enhanced, or transforr According to the Characterisation and Growth Strategy London Plan Guidance (LPG), 'transform' areas typically possess low-quality development of ill-defined character, offering the chance to establish a newly coherent character. These are likely to include places such as retail parks, industrial estates (often for residential co-location), under optimised land adjacent to town centres, and land bordering arterial routes.

While the LPG states that the presence of heritage assets or pockets of intact, high quality urban fabric does not automatically preclude the identification of a 'transform' area, in such instances it states that clear guidance should be given on how these valued features will be retained and enhanced. Historic England strongly believes that in appropriate circumstances the presence of heritage assets can act as a catalyst for high-quality place-shaping. A wide range of advice on how development proposals can take account of the 'significance' of heritage assets, including a series of Good Practice Advice and Historic England Advice Notes, can be found online.



**The Wallis, Hackney Wick**
Now at a later stage of development, Fish Island/Hackney Wick, within the LLDC Opportunity Area, has undergone transformational change, delivering new housing alongside retained artist studios, bars and light industry, suggesting continuity with its pre-existing character.

The LPG also makes clear that areas with a higher capacity for growth (often linked with good transport connections) are not necessarily appropriate locations for tall buildings, bringing to the fore the critical role of dense, mid-rise building types in creating places of a human scale that relate well to the city as a whole.

# Successful approaches to contextual transformation

## Repairing and enhancing the urban fabric

The repurposing of a complex of historic buildings can form the centrepiece for transformation of a large site. In such cases there is an opportunity to repair and enhance the urban fabric while reintegrating with the surrounding townscape.

Understanding a site's context and character, while responding sensitively to its existing historic buildings, can help to create high-quality living environments while ensuring that density is more a natural outcome of, than an input to, the design process.

Repairing the urban fabric involves:

- Understanding and responding to the character and significance of the place and its existing historic buildings.
- Respecting historic street patterns and reinstating lost connections where possible.
- Maintaining a fine urban grain that reflects historic patterns of development.
- Creating positive relationships between existing and new buildings or spaces
- maintaining continuity along existing building lines.
- Establishing clear hierarchy of fronts, backs and sides for new buildings.
- Maintaining a human scale of development.



New and old buildings sitting comfortably side by side at **Plaistow Hospital / Upton Village**



Repairing back-to-back relationships with soft landscaped gardens at **Plaistow Hospital / Upton Village**



Maintaining an inviting, human scale of development at **Woodside Square**



**The old hospital site is subdivided into well-proportioned development parcels that back onto surrounding amenities and creates new street facing buildings.**

**The development has created positive relationships with surrounding terraces by introducing back-to-back gardens.**

**The historic character is celebrated and original features, including sash windows and vaulted ceilings, are conserved.**



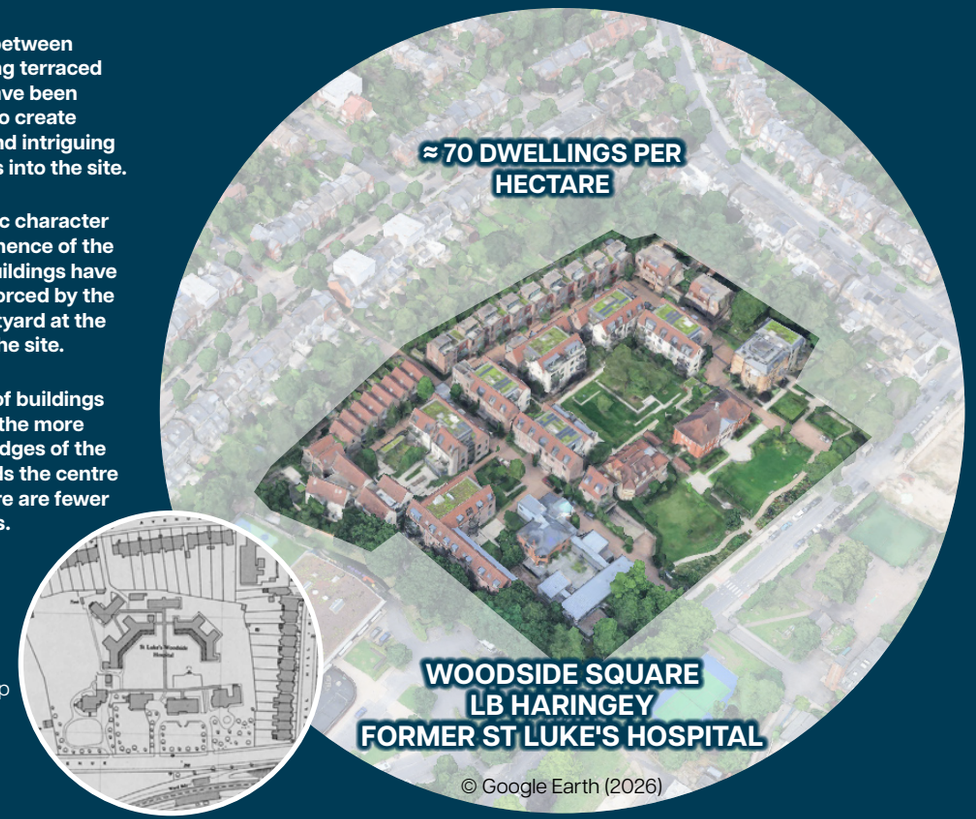



Historic map © National Library of Scotland

**The gaps between surrounding terraced housing have been exploited to create intimate and intriguing new routes into the site.**

**The historic character and prominence of the hospital buildings have been reinforced by the large courtyard at the centre of the site.**

**The scale of buildings rises from the more sensitive edges of the site towards the centre where there are fewer constraints.**






Historic map © National Library of Scotland

## Introducing a distinctive new character

Large sites can present opportunities to introduce a new character. However, no site is a blank canvas. Instead, the new character should emerge by taking cues from and making positive connections with the surrounding context.

Meaningful community engagement is a key component of the masterplanning process, helping to ensure that the new neighbourhood becomes a cherished part of the city over time.

Responding to landscape features and environmental constraints - such as the discovery of significant archaeological remains, hedgerows, public rights of way or underground utilities – can also be a driver of positive place-shaping. It may force designers away from predictable patterns toward irregular, inadvertently picturesque, and characterful townscapes.

A contextual approach to introducing a new character involves:

- Understanding what is distinctive about the location and reinforcing positive elements.
- Relating proposed building typologies to the functional character of the neighbourhood.
- Ensuring new areas feel like a continuation of the surrounding city, drawing inspiration from London's successful high density historic buildings and places.

Large, family sized homes in mid-rise buildings with shared, green open spaces as well as private gardens offers a human scaled place at **Chiswick Gate.**





**Chiswick Gate**



**Brentford Lock**



The saw toothed roofs and robust, protruding brick frame of inset balconies along the canalside buildings at **Brentford Lock** offer a bold, contemporary character that reflects the site's history as a functioning wharf.

**The new development mediates between the larger scale of offices along the roundabout to the east and lower-scale terraces to the west**

**A formal arrangement of communal gardens surrounded by townhouses and apartment blocks creates a neo-Georgian character.**

**A generous central square offers residents a well-landscaped open space and respite from the surrounding noisy, polluted highways.**




**This rejuvenates Brentford High Street by linking the town centre to the waterfront and reinstating lost connections to the River Brent and inland waterway.**

**New wide streets and spaces create space for children to play and prioritise pedestrian and cyclist movement.**

**The new form of development echoes the historic working yards and maximises frontages with views over the water and canal path.**



## Integrating isolated sites

Isolated sites, typically bounded by waterways or significant highway and railway infrastructure, are common opportunities in London. While physically constrained, the nature of these locations can be a driver of innovation. The future identity of these developments should take cues from the site's character, history and landscape - including topography, geology, and hydrology - to identify and reinvigorate existing features. Celebrating a place's history through archaeology and historic records allows for a narrative-led transformation of its local character.

Connectivity is a key principle of Good Growth and it can help to transform previously neglected or disconnected areas into more cohesive, vibrant neighbourhoods. Integrating isolated sites involves:

- Understanding the site's character, history and landscape to inform the design approach.
- Forging new connections through bridges, streets, cycle routes or pedestrian walkways.
- Creating a permeable pattern of development with inviting streets.
- Ensuring new buildings address the surrounding area as well as the site.
- Enabling visual connections between new and existing places.

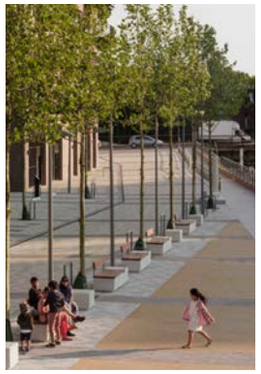






**Chelsea Barracks** has been transformed from a sealed site to a permeable street network







**Hale Wharf** - A permeable grain of development offers a generous new riverside promenade with carefully positioned gaps between buildings to create new views to and through the site

**The Chelsea Barracks site was historically cut off from its surroundings via a secure perimeter.**

**The scale of new buildings - all of which are outward facing - is directly proportional to the type of street or open spaces they address.**

**A key move of the masterplan has been to introduce a permeable pattern of development with inviting streets and spaces.**




**Hale Wharf occupies a sliver of land where the urban intensity of Tottenham Hale meets the reservoirs and rivers of the Lea Valley.**

**The design ensures boating access and infrastructure maintenance while serving as a vital link in Haringey's 'Green Grid' through a child-friendly, shared street at the island's core.**

**New pedestrian linkages and bridges help to connect the island site back to its surroundings.**



## Managing transitions in character

Most masterplans for regeneration in London are situated at the interface of different site conditions, where the appropriate design response is not immediately obvious because the local character is inconsistent, varied in quality, or even changes abruptly. This could include the transition between former industrial areas and adjacent historic neighbourhoods, or even the open countryside.

Successfully managing these transitions in character can help to shape unique and distinctive places. A contextual approach to this challenge involves:

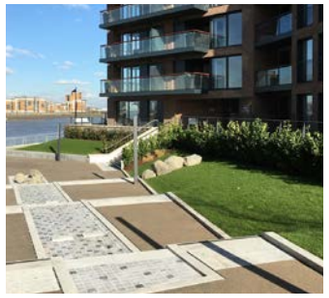
- Focusing on the edges of sites where old and new development meets, to understand the character of both the site itself and its context.
- Providing continuity between new and existing communities through the provision of physical and visual connections, complementary social infrastructure and amenities.
- Avoiding abrupt or excessive changes in the scale of new development, considering graduation in building heights where this is an effective way to manage transition.
- Prioritising compact forms of development and appropriate use of mid-rise typologies to achieve high densities.
- Embracing the relationship between different historical layers as a means of producing highly memorable and characterful places.
- Using landscaping, planting and public realm as part of a site wide strategy to integrate the site with its context.



New buildings take cues from the robust brick masonry aesthetic of nearby existing buildings at **Ram Quarter**.



A more contemporary character is created along the previously inaccessible Wandle riverside at **Ram Quarter**.



The orderly character of streets around the **Royal Arsenal** gives way to more informal and generous public realm towards the river Thames at Woolwich Arsenal.



New mid-rise buildings maintain the building line and rhythm of the historic barracks at **Pavilion Square** in Woolwich Arsenal.



**New buildings are nestled in between historic buildings creating a positive interplay and tension between the industrial heritage and contemporary character of the new neighbourhood.**

**The new morphology directly responds to surrounding patterns of development (from the finer grain town centre to the coarser industrial buildings to the north.**

**A rich mix of employment, commercial, retail and residential uses helps to bleed the activities and footfall from the adjacent Wandsworth High Street into the site.**




**The ribbon like park, Maribor Park, crosses the site and echoes the footprint of the Crossrail tunnel below ground.**

**Redundant historic buildings and military infrastructure are reimagined with new uses such as homes, shops, bars and restaurants, integrating them into new development.**

**The masterplan harnesses the existing urban form setting out a legible network of streets, lanes and open spaces.**

**Also once an isolated site, the scheme opens up a sealed-off area to the rest of the town, addressing the barrier of Plumstead Road.**



# Closing reflections

Historic England believes that the development of the new London Plan, responsive to the capital's identified need for 880,000 new homes, is an opportunity to reinforce London's identity by learning from its high-density historic places. This report explores three approaches to delivering new housing, all of which respond to current or emerging trends in planning policy and draw on recent good practice.

**Adaptive re-use** is the first opportunity. The re-use of historic buildings has always been at the heart of their conservation and repurposing existing buildings can be the most immediate way of delivering new homes. It can also provide housing at a much lower carbon cost than new development. National and local planning policies are placing increasing importance on re-use, adaptation and retrofit as critical elements of our response to the climate crisis.

**Sensitive intensification** provides the second opportunity. There remains across London substantial scope to infill, to extend, or to amalgamate building plots in response to existing patterns of development. Sometimes it may be appropriate to work with the established architectural character; sometimes there may be an opportunity to innovate or experiment. This approach may begin with limited interventions, but its cumulative effects can be considerable and should therefore be carefully managed.

The third opportunity is **contextual transformation**. The capacity for substantial development in opportunity areas and other places with similar potential can be realised in ways that respond meaningfully to context. This may transform the character of an area, but transformation rooted in context will create richer, better integrated and more liveable places than can otherwise be achieved.

Underlying these approaches is an understanding of both the dynamism of London and of the extraordinary potential of the historic city to provide templates for its own future development. What is required is a vision that sees London itself as a whole, for all its complexity, and uses London's historic patterns of development as templates for the future.



The Park within **Elephant Park**, Southwark

# Key reports




**Heritage Works for Housing (2024)**

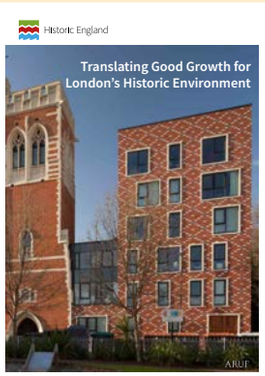
Author: Historic England, Deloitte

Guidance for developers on the process of repurposing historic buildings for housing




**Small Site Design Codes London Plan Guidance (LPG) (2023)**

Author: Greater London Authority




**Translating Good Growth for London's Historic Environment (2017)**

Author: Historic England, Arup:

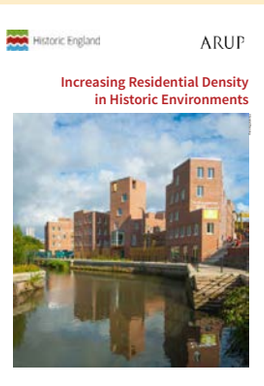
A study on how the historic environment contributes to 'Good Growth' in London




**Heritage Investment Prospectus (2026)**

Author: Historic England

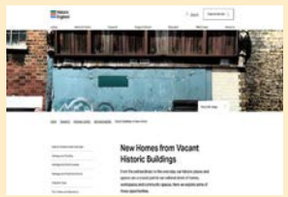
A resource supporting developers and owners in securing investment for the adaptive re-use of heritage sites




**Increasing Residential Density in Historic Environments (2018)**

Author: Historic England, Arup, Cundall

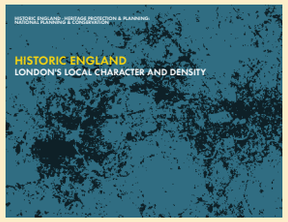
Research and case studies on delivering density in historic places




**New Homes from Vacant Historic Buildings - Heritage Counts (2025)**

Author: Historic England

Insight report quantifying the potential for housing within vacant historic stock




**London's Local Character and Density (2016)**

Author: Historic England, Allies and Morrison

A characterisation study of London's diverse typologies and their density potentials



# References


1 **London's Local Character and Density** (2016) Historic England / Allies and Morrison

2 **Complex City: London's Changing Character** (2020) Allies and Morrison / Historic England / RIBA Publishing

3 **Historic England Advice Note 4: Tall Buildings** (2022) Historic England

4 **LETI Climate Emergency Retrofit Guide**, page 18 (2021) LETI

5 **London's Local Character and Density** (2016) Historic England / Allies and Morrison; **Complex City: London's Changing Character** (2020) Allies and Morrison / Historic England / RIBA Publishing

6 **Heritage Counts** (2014) Historic England

7 **New Ideas Need Old Buildings** (2013) Heritage Lottery Fund

8 **The Role of Historic Buildings in Urban Regeneration** (2004) House of Commons Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions Committee

9 **London's Local Character and Density** (2016) Historic England / Allies and Morrison; **Complex City: London's Changing Character** (2020) Allies and Morrison / Historic England / RIBA Publishing

10 **Natural England's Strategy: Underpinning Evidence** (2025) Natural England; **Why Nature Close to Home Matters: Evidence from the People and Nature Survey** (2026) Natural England

11 **Wellbeing and Heritage Evidence** (2026) Historic England / University of Glasgow

12 **Key London figures** (2026) Greenspace information for Greater London CIC

13 **Historic England website, Technical Guidance page and Planning Advice pages**

14 **New Homes from Vacant Historic Buildings - Heritage Counts** (2025) Historic England

15 **Meanwhile, in London: Making use of London's empty spaces** (2018) Centre for London

16 **From Vacancy to Vitality: Repurposing London's secondary offices for housing conversion** (2025) BusinessLDN and CBRE

17 **Small Sites Design Codes London Plan Guidance** (2023) Greater London Authority

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| 4 | The Park, Elephant Park | Gillespies | Lendlease | Author image |
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| 5 | Unity Place, South Kilburn | **Gort Scott***, Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios, and Alison Brooks Architects | LB Brent | Paul Riddle |
| 7 | St Clements Hospital, Mile End | JTP, **Avanti Architects*** | Vistry | Jack Hobhouse |
| 8 | Brentford Lock | **Mae Architects***, Morris + Company, Mikhail Riches | Waterside Places | Rory Gardiner |
| 8 | Ram Quarter, Wandsworth | EPR Architects | Greenland Holdings, Minerva PLC, Delancey | Simon Kennedy |
| 9 | King's Cross | **Allies and Morrison*** (masterplanners), Townshend | King's Cross Central Limited Partnership | John Sturrock |
| 12 | Keybridge House (1) | Allies and Morrison | BT Property, Mount Anvil | Tim Crocker |
| 12 | Keybridge House (2) | Allies and Morrison | BT Property, Mount Anvil | Tim Crocker |
| 14 | King's Cross | **Allies and Morrison*** (masterplanners), Townshend | King's Cross Central Limited Partnership | John Sturrock |
| 15 | Woodside Square, Muswell Hill | **PTE Architects***, Farrer Huxley | Hanover Housing Association and Hill Group UK | Morley von Sternberg |
| 15 | Brent Cross Town | **Allies and Morrison***, Gillespies | Argent | John Sturrock |
| 15 | Woodside Square, Muswell Hill | **Farrer Huxley***, PTE Architects | Hanover Housing Association and Hill Group UK | Farrer Huxley |

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| 15 | South Gardens, Elephant Park | Maccreanor Lavington | Lendlease | Author image |
| 16 | Newcourt Street | Wendover | Wendover Development | Simon Menges |
| 16 | Centre Point, Camden | Conran and Partners | Almacantar | Luke Hayes |
| 16 | Fitzroy Place | **Lifschutz Davidson Sandilands***, Sheppard Robson | Exemplar, Aviva Investors | Hufton + Crow |
| 17 | Hornsey Town Hall | Make Architects | Far East Consortium | Make Architects |
| 17 | St Clement's Hospital, Mile End | JTP, **Avanti Architects*** | Vistry | Craig Auckland |
| 17 | Woodside Square, Muswell Hill | **Farrer Huxley***, PTE Architects | Hanover Housing Association and Hill Group UK | Farrer Huxley |
| 21 | Thrale Almshouses | BPTW | Thrale Almshouses and Relief in Need Charity | Robert Greshoff |
| 21 | Enterprise House | FSP Architects | Workspace Group | Author image |
| 22 | Centre Point, Camden | Conran and Partners | Almacantar | Luke Hayes |
| 22 | New Concordia Wharf | PTE Architects | Regalian Homes and Notting Hill Housing | Morley von Sternberg |
| 22 | Prince of Wales Road | Allies and Morrison | Community Housing Association and Dorrington Properties PLC | Allies and Morrison |
| 22 | Asta House | Make Architects | Derwent London | Jack Hobhouse |
| 23 | Antony and Roderick House, Bermondsey | **HKR Architects***, HTA Design | Lambeth and Southwark Housing Association | HKR |

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| 23 | St John's Wood Police Station, Newcourt Street | Wendover | Wendover Development | Simon Menges |
| 23 | St Clements Hospital, Mile End | JTP, **Avanti Architects*** | Vistry | Craig Auckland |
| 23 | Baylis Old School | Conran and Partners | Henley Homes | Edmund Sunmer |
| 24 | Trace on Drummond Street | Bureau de Change | HGG London | After image: Gilbert McCarragher<br><br>Before image: Bureau de Change |
| 25 | 8 Bleeding Heart Yard | Groupwork | Seaforth Land Holdings | After image: Timothy Soar<br><br>Before image: Groupwork |
| 25 | Zodiac House | shedkm | Common Projects | Agnese Sanvito |
| 26 | Bourne Estate | Matthew Lloyd Architects | LB Camden | Ben Luxmoore |
| 27 | Bourne Estate | Matthew Lloyd Architects | LB Camden | Patricia Woodward |
| 29 | Antony and Roderick House, Bermondsey | **HKR Architects***, HTA Design | Lambeth and Southwark Housing Association | HKR |
| 29 | Barts Square | Sheppard Robson, Maccreanor Lavington | Helical | Author image |
| 29 | Mildmay Mission Hospital complex, Shoreditch | **Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios***, Matthew Lloyd Architects | Genesis Housing Group | Will Pryce |
| 30 | William Street Quarter | Allford Hall Monaghan Morris Architects | LB Barking and Dagenham, Laing O'Rourke | Tim Soar |
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| 31 | Dover Court Estate | PTE Architects | LB Islington | Tom Bright |



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| 33 | House in East Dulwich | 31/44 Architects | Private client | Author image |
| 33 | Heath House | Patalab Architects | Private client | Julian Adams |
| 33 | House in Clapham | Bureau de Change | Private client | Author image |
| 33 | 200 Becontree Avenue | Archio | Be First, LB Barking and Dagenham | French + Tye |
| 33 | Dover Court Estate | PTE Architects | LB Islington | Tom Bright |
| 36 | Purley Downs Road | Harp & Harp | Star Homes | Adam Scott |
| 36 | Illustration of subdivided houses at Kidderpore Green | Allies and Morrison | Barratt London, Hampstead School of Art | Allies and Morrison |
| 37 | Aikin Terrace | Stephen Taylor | LB Hackney | David Grandorge |
| 37 | Slim House, Clapham | Almanac | Private client | Richard Chivers |
| 37 | General view of buildings on the south side of Langham Street at twilight, showing numbers 40 to 50 from the north-east, with the Yorkshire Grey public house at the centre | N/A | N/A | Christopher Redgrave © Historic England Archive DP177575 |
| 39 | 174 Rye Lane | Dowen Farmer | Harvard Taylor | Axson Office |
| 39 | 95 Peckham Road | Peter Barber Architects | Kuropatwa | Morley von Sternberg |
| 39 | Agar Grove Estate | **Mae Architects***, Hawkins Brown and Architype | LB Camden | Tim Crocker |
| 39 | Bourne Estate | Matthew Lloyd Architects | LB Camden | Ben Luxmoore |
| 39 | Edgewood Mews | Peter Barber Architects | Kuropatwa and Home Group | Morley von Sternberg |

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| 39 | 312 Hackney Road | Cuozzo Company | MASCH Developments | Author image |
| 39 | Parade Housing | EBBA Architects | Developer | EBBA |
| 39 | Swains Lane, Highgate | Tasou Associates | Noble House | Emanuelis Stasaitis |
| 39 | Unity Place, South Kilburn | **Gort Scott*,** Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios, and Alison Brooks Architects | LB Brent | Paul Riddle |
| 39 | Kidderpore Green | Allies and Morrison | Barratt London, Hampstead School of Art | Nick Gutteridge |
| 40 | 14-17 Calais Street, Camberwell | PRP | Unknown | David Bank |
| 40 | Purley Downs Road | Harp & Harp | Star Homes | Adam Scott |
| 40 | Angle House, Tottenham | Carbogno Ceneda Architects | Andrea Carbogno, Sophia Ceneda | Author image |
| 40 | Idlewild Mews, Croydon | vPPR | Brick by Brick, LB Croydon | Will Scott |
| 40 | Lucien Road | Harp & Harp | Private client | Adam Scott |
| 40 | Kidderpore Green - illustration of subdivided houses at | Allies and Morrison | Barratt London, Hampstead School of Art | Allies and Morrison |
| 40 | Kidderpore Green - Illustration of subdivision of semi-detached pair | Allies and Morrison | Barratt London, Hampstead | Allies and Morrison |
| 41 | 200 Becontree Avenue | Archio | Be First, LB Barking and Dagenham | French + Tye |
| 41 | Charlie Ratchford Court | PRP | LB Camden | Author image |
| 41 | Copper Lane | Henley Halebrown Architects | Six Families | Nick Kane |
| 41 | Ely Court | Alison Brooks | LB Brent, Catalyst Housing | Paul Riddle |



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| 41 | Hafer Road | Peter Barber Architects | Hafer Road Ltd | Morley von Sternberg |
| 41 | Hermitage Mews | Gbolade Design | Placemakers London | Gbolade Design Studio |
| 41 | Moore Park Mews | Stephen Taylor | Baylight Properties | David Grandorge |
| 41 | Moray Mews, Finsbury Park | Peter Barber Architects | Roberto Caravona | Morley von Sternberg |
| 41 | Nunhead Green | AOC | One Housing, LB Southwark | David Grandorge |
| 45 | Brentford Lock | **Mae Architects***, Morris + Company, Mikhail Riches | Waterside Places | Rory Gardiner |
| 45 | Goodluck Hope | Allies and Morrison | Ballymore Group | Chris Bearman |
| 45 | Lampton Road | Allies and Morrison | Notting Hill Genesis and LB Hounslow | James Newton |
| 49 | The Wallis, Hackney Wick | Stockwool | M&D Silk Properties | Author image |
| 50 | Upton Village, former Plaistow Hospital | AHR Architects | Peabody | AHR Architects |
| 50 | Upton Village, former Plaistow Hospital | AHR Architects | Peabody | AHR Architects |
| 50 | Woodside Square, Muswell Hill | PTE Architects | Hanover Housing Association and Hill Group UK | Morley von Sternberg |
| 52 | Brentford Lock | **Mae Architects**,* Morris + Company, Mikhail Riches | Waterside Places | Rory Gardiner |
| 52 | Brentford Lock | **Mae Architects***, Morris + Company, Mikhail Riches | Waterside Places | Rory Gardiner |
| 52 | Chiswick Gate | Macfarlane, JTP | Berkeley Homes (West London) Limited | Author image |
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| 54 | Chelsea Barracks (masterplan image) | **Squire & Partners*** (masterplan), Eric Parry Architects (delivery) | Qatari Diar | Squire & Partners |
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| 56 | Ram Quarter, Wandsworth | EPR architects | Greenland Holdings, Minerva PLC, | Simon Kennedy |
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Allies and Morrison