

# Consultation commences on new London Housing Strategy

**The London Mayor has responsibility to produce a housing strategy for London that takes account of the capital's specific housing problems.**

Boris Johnson published his draft London Housing Strategy in November 2008.

From November, there was a 13-week consultation period with the Greater London Authority (GLA) assembly members and its functional bodies, including Transport for London and the London Development Agency.

Some alterations may occur as a result of their comments before a further 13-week public consultation commences in May 2009.

There may be further changes following the public consultation. Finally the Government has its say. Once agreed by the Government (probably by the autumn), the strategy will then be published as London's first statutory housing strategy. London's councils will then be required to amend their own strategies to comply with it.

## Funding for the Mayor's Plans

The 2007 Greater London Authority Act gave the Mayor responsibility over London's resources (from central government) for investment in new and existing housing. These comprise of three funding streams:

1. £5 billion over the next three years for new affordable housing. This

money is distributed through the newly formed 'Homes and Communities Agency'. The Agency has a London board which is chaired by London's Mayor.

2. £440 million for 2008-11 for London boroughs to meet the decent homes standard by 2010/11.
3. £285 million for 2009/11 for a range of programmes that come under the Mayor's 'Targeted Funding Stream'. This includes money for converting homes or building extensions to make larger sized homes and for bringing private homes in London up to a decent standard.

## Strategy proposals

Boris Johnson proposes to retain the previous Mayor's promise of 50,000 new 'affordable homes' in London over the next three years, more family housing and better space standards and design. He also wants to address the problem of empty homes.

The previous Mayor, Ken Livingstone set a target for 70% of affordable homes to be social rented and 30% intermediate.

Boris Johnson proposes to change the targets to 60% and 40% respectively.

He aims to encourage more people to 'get a foot on the housing ladder' through a £130 million 'First Steps' housing programme. The scheme is to provide public funds to raise the eligi-

bility for shared ownership schemes from an annual household income of £60,000 to £72,000.

LTF members are critical that the consultation document does not propose that the building of new council housing could play a positive part in addressing London's acute housing problems.



**Boris Johnson aims to reduce (%) targets for social rented housing**

## Tenants consultation

LTF members will respond together to the public consultation which ends 31.08.09 and we hope a number of them will also respond individually, focusing on issues particular to their own boroughs.

We have been awarded some funding from the GLA to encourage a greater number of tenants organisations to respond to the consultation. To this end we will be holding consultation events in Hammersmith and Fulham, Newham and Hackney.

London Tenants Federation is an umbrella organisation bringing together London's borough-wide council tenant Federations and Organisations. We do not aim to supersede any of our member organisations but rather bring them together to share, exchange and campaign together, providing a strong voice for London's council tenants at the regional level. LTF delegates are represented on the Mayor's Housing Forum. One of our delegates chairs the Forum's Community Engagement Sub-Group. We respond to regional and national government consultations.

LTF is a member of the London Civic Forum and the London Voluntary Sector Council. We have links with other regional and national tenants organisations and with organisations representing tenants of other tenures in London. Around two thirds of London's borough-wide council tenants federations and organisations are LTF members. We are funded by London Councils, in the past through its Housing Steering Group and since October 2008, through a 4-year grant from its Grant's Committee.



# Planning for a Better London

## New Mayor sets out his 'direction of travel'

**The London Mayor has responsibilities for producing and updating both the London Housing Strategy and the London Plan, London's strategic planning document.**

In July 2008, Boris Johnson produced a consultation document called 'Planning for a Better London' which sets out what he describes as his 'direction of travel' for his term of office and a programme for revising the existing London Plan, which was produced by the previous London Mayor, Ken Livingstone.

### The Mayor's approach

The Mayor will:

- Develop a new 'consensual approach' with London's councils on how the planning objectives for London can best be achieved.
- Continue an 'evidence-based' emphasis to policy making and support tackling disadvantage in inner London.
- Place greater emphasis on outer London issues.
- Review the current 'sub-regional' model around planning.
- Support much of the underlying analysis and strategy of the existing London Plan, particularly around economic and demographic growth; protection and enhancement of London's world

city role; climate change, environmental quality and promotion of social inclusion.

- Focus on strategic issues rather than on things that are 'better done at the local level'.
- Hold an annual London Planning Convention.

### Key challenges

- Addressing London's population growth, due to increase by 560,000 – 700,000 by 2026.
- Acknowledging that London's economy accounts for just under a fifth of the UK's output; is more heavily private sector-based than elsewhere (76% of London's employment).
- Addressing London's entrenched unemployment problems, deprivation, social exclusion and discrimination.
- Realising the potential for growth in all parts of London.
- Tackling climate change.
- Supporting organic growth, diversity of neighbourhoods and protection of familiar landmarks and architectural heritage.
- Addressing the lack of affordable housing which has increased housing divides and exacerbated poverty and social exclusion.
- Considering the needs of all Lon-

doners by taking action to target particular groups and also adapting more general approaches, e.g. through promoting 'Lifetime' homes and neighbourhoods, to ensure accessibility for all.

- Addressing the need to support infrastructure, including transport in housing developments in the Thames Gateway.

### Key policy responses

- Give greater focus to 'economic success' in outer London.
- Ensure physical improvements are complemented by skills and training programmes.
- Develop an implementation framework for key areas of the economy with support for all London enterprises (multi-national to small); an outer London Commission and a planning policy framework to deal with issues facing the 'Central Activity Zone'.
- Retain the previous Mayor's target for 50,000 affordable homes over the next three years.
- Produce a new housing needs, capacity and market survey with binding agreement with local authorities.
- Deliver higher levels of intermediate housing, less social rented housing and more family sized homes.
- Improve standards for quality, liveability and sustainability of neighbourhoods.
- Protect back gardens and playing fields from development.
- Produce special guidance on climate change issues and on protection and planting of trees and woodland.
- Review the Mayor's transport strategy. Oppose the third runway at Heathrow, but support a new airport in East London.
- Develop guidance on use of the Thames for transportation of goods.
- Develop plans to make the most of the legacy of the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games.



**The London Plan's sub-regions are slightly different in name, to the borough's sub-regional housing partnerships (see p 5) and Hackney lies within the London Plan's N sub-region, but within the E London sub-regional housing partnership**

# London Tenants Federation

## response to 'Planning for a Better London'

**Sixteen of our member organisations responded together to the consultation on the Mayor's 'Planning for a Better London'. A summary is detailed below.**

**London's growth** LTF has concerns about the continued focus on growth in London; since it has been of little benefit to the communities the LTF represents.

Over the last 10 years the disparity between those who have and those who don't have has escalated.

Income levels of the top 50% have increased significantly while the bottom 25% have got poorer.

London has the highest incidence nationally of child poverty, after housing costs are taken into account.

We propose that a new analysis of projected long-term population growth and of average household sizes be undertaken, particularly in the light of the current recession.

**Evidence based approach** LTF supports the application of an evidence based approach and believes there must be very firm policy guidelines and targets to address evidenced need. This must address need for higher levels of social housing.

**Social rented housing targets** LTF is disappointed that the Mayor aims to reduce the percentage of social housing and increase that for intermediate housing.

This is contrary to evidenced need. The London Housing Strategy Evidence Base 2005 found that to meet need, 59% of housing constructed in London should be social rented, 7% intermediate and only 34% market.

We question the focus on higher levels of home ownership. We note that a recent *Inside Housing Magazine* survey found most social rented housing tenants content to remain as tenants.

Many who would like to have the opportunity to access low cost rented homes have been forced to buy above their means. An increased number are facing repossession.

We argue for a right to rent and for more government investment in low cost rented homes. Intermediate

housing is too expensive for those it is designed for and does not address need.

We support the Mayor's proposals around bringing empty homes back into use in the capital.

**Quality of homes** We would like to see good internal and external space standards, sensitive levels of housing density and access to community and youth facilities included in 'good design' principles

We are pleased that the Mayor has made commitments relating to protection of play, garden and green spaces. We propose this be extended to all playgrounds, play spaces and playing fields (including those on school land and housing estates).

We propose all public land be protected from private development and that it be made available exclusively for public use and benefit.

**Sustainable communities** LTF has consistently raised concerns about the failure to address the need for supporting infrastructure for existing populations and in areas of new communities such as the Thames Gateway.

We are pleased that the Mayor has referred to this in his consultation paper and look forward to seeing firm policies to address this.

If we are to have sustainable communities it is vital to address environmental and climate change issues.

Additional funding must be allocated to address climate change.

**Consensual approach** LTF is concerned that the 'consensual approach' proposed by the Mayor will simply mean a more laissez-faire approach to developers and market led development; resulting in less social rented housing and further erosion of the social infrastructure that all communities need and are entitled to.

We propose social infrastructure and access to green and leisure facilities must be protected through binding agreements and, indeed, be expanded to meet the needs and interests of local communities.

**Decentralised model and greater emphasis on outer London.** LTF supports this approach and previously has criticised over-development and gentrification of the Central London Zone.

**Olympic and Paralympic games** Since there has been massive detrimental impact on poorer communities in other cities that have hosted the Olympic Games, we propose the Mayor work closely with the boroughs to carry out a Social Impact Assessment and a Community Engagement Strategy

We also propose the development of a strategy to ameliorate any negative impact on existing residents, small businesses and voluntary sector agencies.



Olympic Park development

# Housing and Planning in the SW London sub-region

**The London Tenants Federation held its first sub-regional housing and planning meeting in SW London in November 2008.**

The meeting was hosted by Sutton Federation of Tenants and Residents associations and tenant representatives from Croydon, Lambeth, Kingston, Sutton and Wandsworth were in attendance.

Shelagh Hair, the chief executive of the SW London Housing Partnership, and Carrole Forrest from the GLA's housing and homelessness team were speakers at the event.

Shelagh talked about the SW London Housing Partnership and its strategy and Carrole Forrest spoke about the regional strategies - the London Plan and the London Housing Strategy and how they impact on local policies and strategies.

There was opportunity for attendees to question the speakers, to contribute to debate and to attend one of three workshops that looked in more detail at housing and planning issues in the SW sub-region.

Workshops were held on: how tenants can influence local planning policies, how tenants might challenge



**LTF's SW London sub-regional housing and planning event**

local planning applications, identifying tenants' priorities within the sub region and how the borough-wide tenants' federations and organisations might build links with one another.

## **Making links**

As with many LTF events, we also try to use them to build links with other organisations that have an interest in housing and planning. Often we

invite guest facilitators to run or assist in workshops.

Richard Lee from Just Space Planning Network and Helen Astley from Planning Aid for London facilitated workshops at this event.

The speakers and workshops were incredibly informative. Even some of the most experienced tenants representatives noted that before the event they had been unaware of the fact that their borough officers and members work together within the sub-region and that there are sub-regional housing strategies.

## **SW London boroughs**

There are wide differences between the boroughs in the SW London sub-region, stretching from the Inner London borough of Lambeth, which has three wards in the top 10% and 16 in the top 20% most deprived wards in England, to Richmond upon Thames, which is the least deprived borough in England and has some of the highest property prices.

Home ownership levels vary from 86% in Merton to 37% in Lambeth.

The shortage of social rented housing is, though, the most pressing issue in each of the SW London boroughs, as is ensuring that public and private sector homes are brought up to a decent standard.



**'How tenants can influence local planning policy' workshop**

# London's sub-regional housing partnerships

London has five sub-regional housing partnerships, which were brought together in 2004 when the Housing Corporation (now the Homes and Communities Agency) started to allocate funding for new housing sub-regionally rather than locally.

Each has a strategy or policies and priorities. They run some housing schemes together.

The partnerships can also bid together for funding from the Mayor's 'Targeted Funding Stream', including funds to support better conditions in the private sector.

While borough officers and lead councillors are involved with the sub-regional partnerships, tenants are not.

The London Tenants Federation plans to hold further sub-regional events on housing and planning issues in London's sub-regions over the next two years.



## Tax on tenants increased this year

Soon after councils sent out their obligatory information to tenants about rent increases for 2009/10 (on average 6.2%), the Government decided to halve target rents nationally to 3.1%. This reduction should be passed on to tenants.

Councils have had to pay the administrative costs of re-doing rent calculations and informing tenants of any changes. Many have lobbied

Government to cover this cost.

Whilst the reductions are welcome, tenants will still pay £1.7 billion more in rent this year than Government will distribute to councils for managing, maintaining and repairing their homes through the national Housing Revenue Account system.

This comprises of rent being used to pay off interest on loans

taken out to build and improve council homes, plus £250 million (up from last year's £194 million) left after calculations are made by government on how much each council needs in its Housing Revenue Account.

Since the taxpayer (not tenants) benefits from 75% of capital receipts from right to buy LTF argues the taxpayer, not tenants, should foot the above capital costs.

# Government meets with regional tenants' bodies about the HRA Review

After receiving a fair amount of criticism about the failure to engage tenants in the HRA Review, Communities and Local Government met with representatives of regional tenants' organisations from across the country in December 2008.

On many issues there was consensus amongst those in attendance, particularly relating to the need for a stronger ring-fence around the HRA at the local and national level.

There was also agreement that tenants should not be paying for interest payments on loans taken out to build and improve council homes, although some did not seem to understand why or how this historic capital debt had accrued

Differences were expressed on the potential breaking up the national HRA system and whether councils should retain all their rents regardless of the impact on other councils.



Estate-based youth services are often funded through the HRA, but should be funded through the general fund.

## The HRA Review

The Government announced a review of the HRA in December 2007.

**The aim of the review** was to put in place a long-term sustainable system for financing council housing ensuring:

- Fairness and affordability for tenants and taxpayers
- Transparency, giving a clear picture of the balance of support from local and central government
- Minimum standards of service and accommodation
- Rents provide a platform for social and economic mobility of tenants
- Landlords continue to improve quality and efficiency of services
- Greater certainty and less volatility in the future funding of 'social housing'

**The remit of the review** was to:

- Inform the HRA subsidy determinations for 2008/09 and 2009/10
- Inform a policy framework for rents and standards for the regulation of 'social housing'
- Consider options for a future subsidy system, including rents policy
- Commission research to support the review.

## LTF's view

The main problem with the HRA is that government insists tenants nationally foot the bill for historic debt, i.e. pay the interest payments on loans taken out to build and improve council homes. This amounts to around £1.5 billion a year.

LTF argues that the taxpayer, not tenants, should foot the bill for these capital costs since the tax payer that benefits from the majority of the capital receipts gained through right to buy sales.

It believes that council tenants' rents should be used exclusively for the costs of managing, maintaining and carrying out and major repairs to council homes.

Management, maintenance and major repairs allowances are currently under-funded (nationally) by £2.3 billion a year.

If an extra £1.5 billion were available it would cover two-thirds of this under-funding and go a long way to ensuring the sustainability of council housing.

It would make a significant reduction in the amount of rent redistributed between boroughs and would assist in making council housing genuinely sustainable.

## Members News

**From: Graham Nicholls, Lambeth Tenants Council** This year Lambeth tenants are facing far higher rent increases than other London tenants. While others were initially expecting around the 6.2% average increases, Lambeth was proposing 16.5%; an average £12.01 per week increase.

A 5% service charge increase was also proposed, on top of a previous mid-year 65% increase, to meet higher costs of communal heating systems/rising gas prices.

Together this brings average weekly rents and service charges up to £99.15.

As if that weren't enough, many estate residents are also looking at increased payments for door entry systems, of between £2.65 and £8.68, depending on the system.

We were told that if these increases were not imposed, we would face £9m cuts in services, which would have a devastating effect on repairs, cleaning budgets and result in cuts to front line staff.

At the time of going to print all we have heard from our council in relation to the government's halving target rents is that they are looking at the implications for the borough.

**From: Jean Crossby, Sutton Federation of TRAs** For the second year running Sutton tenants have submitted a petition to Downing Street about the unfair distribution of Sutton tenants' rents. We even got to see junior housing minister Ian Wright MP.

Our local campaign has focused on the £10.4 million of Sutton tenants' rents that will be distributed to other councils this year.

Whilst we are not unsupportive of a national council housing finance system, the current system is visibly unfair to those of us who see rents disappearing out of our boroughs.

But the system is unfair for all tenants and all councils since all are under-funded.

It's obvious to many of us that capital costs should be covered by the taxpayer (not tenants).

We don't own our homes, we've never received benefits from increased property values and since

it's the taxpayer that benefits from the 75% of the profits from right to buy sales, it should be the taxpayer, not us, that foots the capital cost bill.

Sutton would keep much more of the rents collected locally if tenants were not unfairly lumbered with paying off historic debt and it would mean that all tenants would end up with better managed and maintained homes.



We donned highwaymen masks and hats to highlight the robbery when we went knocking on Gordon's door.

**From: Helen Cagnoni, Federation of Islington Tenants and Residents Associations** Islington's ALMO, Homes for Islington has recently cut the 28 year old Federation of Islington Tenants and Residents Association's grant.

Throughout the years FITA's discussions have covered rent increases, allocations policies, repairs and maintenance of our homes, regeneration, planning, health, education, pollution, unemployment, the environment and anything else that impacts on council tenants and residents.

The huge meetings that took place when our homes were managed directly by the council and where councillors attended meetings face to face with tenants were replaced a few years ago by meetings with unelected ALMO bureaucrats and private contractors.

FITA aims to continue to provide an independent voice for Islington's tenants as a voluntary organisation. Obviously we do this in the face of increasing levels of informal consultation; forums and questionnaires, rather than democratic debate where we all have a chance to air our views and hear those of others and where seemingly there is no need for accountable to anyone else regarding input.

# Millions allocated to kick start affordable housing schemes

In March, the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) unveiled a £42 million plan to kick-start stalled affordable housing developments. Half of it is for various London and Quadrant Housing Trust schemes.

One scheme at the Elephant and Castle in Southwark had benefited from the additional HCA grant. Plans for 165 market homes, eight shared-ownership and 102 social rented have now been changed to 200 social rented and 75 shared-ownership.

It's excellent news that there will be almost double the number of social rented homes but unfortunately the previous plans for most to be one and two-bed flats sizes is to stay.

This would indicate that the HCA has reneged on its target for 42% of homes developed with its grant to be

family sized homes.

A further £93m will be allocated to five stalled developments over the next year: the Aylesbury Estate, Southwark, Heart of East Greenwich, St Andrews Hospital, Tower Hamlets, Woodberry Down, Hackney and the Holloway Road LW1 project in Islington.

In West Hendon, Barnet, plans for the demolition of 680 council homes and their replacement with 2171 new housing association and market homes seem to be on hold. Regeneration meetings have been cancelled until they know that the necessary finance will be available from the HCA.

In the meantime decent homes works are being carried out to the 680 council homes. Presumably this would not be occurring if they still felt sure the homes were to be demolished.

## Kidbrooke Regeneration

Tejinder Jutley, Greenwich Housing Panel



Plans for improvements to Kidbrooke, Greenwich have recently been approved, but one wonders whether those in housing need will be the main beneficiaries of the Berkeley Homes proposals.

Plans are for new homes, schools, local shops, leisure facilities, additional health facilities, an extended park and transport improvements.

Many of these things are welcome but those of us keeping a sharp eye on the affordable housing figures are slightly more than concerned about

what is being lost.

The Kidbrooke Estate, which is to be demolished has 1900 council flats. Many residents have already been decanted over a period of time.

Of the 4,000 new homes only 37% (rather than the London Plan's 50%) homes will be affordable (1,480). That's 420 fewer than the council homes that are to be demolished.

Only half of these will be social rented (740), so in fact we are losing 1,160 social rented homes, which will be of no help to the increasing number on the council's waiting list.



# LTF delegate's report Mayor's Housing Forum

Jean Kerrigan, Lambeth Tenants Council

London Tenants Federation has two delegates on the Mayor's Housing Forum. We also gain an additional place on the Forum since we chair the Forum's Community Engagement sub-group.

The Forum's meetings are held quarterly. They are attended by officers from the GLA, London Councils, London's Sub-Regional Housing Partnerships, Government Office for London, the Homes and Communities Agency, and representatives of developers.

Other community or voluntary sector organisations with seats on the Forum are Shelter, Homeless Link and Brent Private Tenants.

Although representatives of those who live in rented housing or who are homeless are far out-numbered by service deliverers and landlord organisations, we work hard to ensure that tenants views are heard at the table.

The last few meetings have focused much on the draft Mayor's Housing Strategy. LTF delegates raise issues that have been debated at our general meetings. This includes welcoming the promise of 50,000 new 'affordable homes' in London. We have, though, raised issue with what is deemed to be 'affordable'.

LTF delegates have been critical

of the Mayor's aim to reduce the percentage of social rented homes in housing developments across London and have argued that there is too much focus on the housing market at a time of recession and increasing housing repossessions.

Concerns that increases in housing repossessions will result in higher levels of homelessness have been raised by other Forum members.

We are pleased that the Mayor has mentioned tenant consultation, but feel this needs to be supported and strengthened by funds to enable independent representation for tenants of all tenures from the local to the regional level.

## LTF London Plan Conference

Saturday 25th July

Directory of Social Change, Euston

The conference will have speakers and workshops to examine what the Mayor proposes in his new London Plan and the impact the Plan will have across London. It will also provide opportunities to link with other community and voluntary sector organisations, where we share common interests and concerns.

Please phone or email us (details below) if you wish to attend.

## Views and comments

Please send us your views and comments on the articles / issues raised in the LTF newsletter. We will try our best to include them in our next (September 2009) newsletter.

## Just Space Planning Network meets with London Plan Team

Dave Morris, Haringey Federation of Residents Associations

On May 11th I traipsed down to City Hall on behalf of LTF to a meeting called by the Just Space Network along with representatives of a range of other community organisations, including Friends of the Earth, the Kings Cross Railway Lands Group, and the London Forum of Civic Societies.

We met with officers working on the new London Plan, which is currently being revised by the Mayor and which will dominate planning policies throughout the capital for many years to come.

Draft proposals for a new London Plan are now out for consultation with the London Assembly members and the GLA group. Although the formal public consultation on the new London Plan does not begin until later this year, we need to get out skates on if we are to influence things at the

early stages when it really matters.

The LTF and other groups had already worked together a couple of years ago during the formal Examination in Public (EiP) of revisions made to the London Plan, and spoke out strongly at that time about some of the key failings of the existing Plan drawn up by the previous Mayor, Ken Livingstone.

We will need to do so again in future EiPs, especially with the acute need for well designed social housing rather than high density luxury homes, protection and expansion of community facilities and green spaces in all neighbourhoods, regeneration for ordinary residents not developers making profits, policies that are going to take the threat of climate change seriously and much more.

It's up to us to say again: 'Whose London? - Our London!'