

WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF HIGH-RISE HOUSING? EXAMINING THE LONG-TERM SOCIAL AND FINANCIAL IMPACTS OF RESIDENTIAL TOWERS

Presentation to the Highbury Group 17.4.23

1



2

FOUR LEAD AUTHORS:

Dickon Robinson - previously Development Director of the Peabody Trust,
Kath Scanlon - distinguished fellow at the LSE who has lead on research on social policy and high-rise and high-density housing

Andrew Beharrell - senior advisor Pollard Thomas Edwards, architects

June Barnes - previously CEO of East Thames Housing Association

SUPPORTED BY ARCHITECTS:

Allies and Morrison, Pollard Thomas Edwards, Levitt Bernstein

3

BOOK OF EIGHT ESSAYS COVERING:

- Context
- Service charges
- Briefing on the current regulatory framework
- Market for high rise housing
- Design and construction
- Wellbeing in high-rise housing
- Feedback from residents on what works and what doesn't
- High-rise and public open space

Conclusions and Recommendations

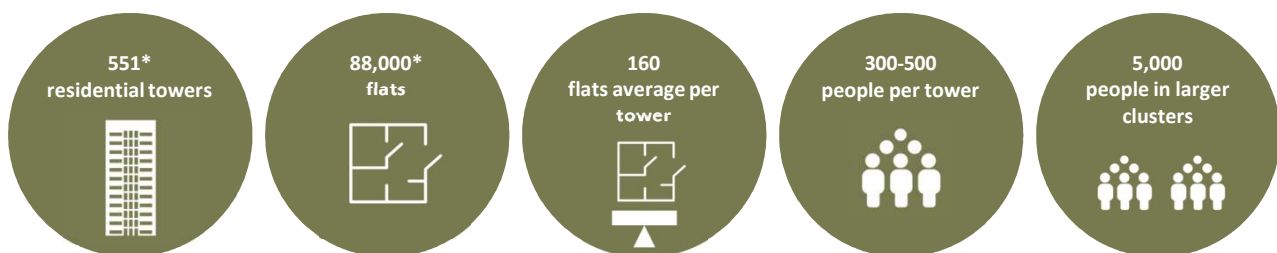
4

CONTEXT

- Definition of high-rise housing used in the book – 30m or 10 storeys and over – NLA survey covers 20 storeys and over
- Towers seen as part of becoming a ‘world city’ and as a way of meeting housing demand
- Growth of towers in London, Manchester and other urban areas from 2000
- Towers being developed by private sector initially for sale and more recently build for rent
- Initially limited affordable housing, mostly shared ownership – now increasing including affordable rent
- Initially towers in high end locations & sold abroad, more UK purchasers as towers developed in cheaper neighbourhoods

5

CONTEXT – LONDON



* NLA London Tall Buildings Survey 2022

6

SERVICE CHARGES

Main findings:

- Current regulation for setting service charges and sinking funds is inadequate – mainly best practice guidance from RICS supported by recourse to the Lands Tribunal
- Currently, service charges and sinking funds at first sale are often understated meaning leaseholders become liable for large one-off, unexpected payments for major component renewal
- Need to model the long-term performance of components of a building and develop a lifetime costed reinvestment programme which is regularly updated
- The costed reinvestment programme should be provided by the developer on first sale to each purchaser and then to each subsequent owner

7

DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION

Main findings:

- To meet higher technical standards, particularly around environmental performance and fire safety, all new homes have become increasingly complex and costly to build and maintain
- Tall buildings are especially complex and costly to build and maintain because of access issues and performance requirements, which increase with height (structure, cladding and environmental services)
- Building regulations were originally conceived around low-rise traditional construction and have evolved incrementally to try to keep up with changing construction challenges and technologies
- There is overlap, confusion and contradiction between building regulations and planning standards
- Designers and developers do not adequately address ease of maintenance and replacement of aging components
- Building components will require several rounds of replacement in the life of a 125- or 250-year lease, let alone 999 years. What happens when a building in multi-ownership requires a major refit or complete replacement?

8

WELLBEING IN HIGH RISE HOUSING

- UK high-rises historically were mainly social housing—change in last 30 years
- Social scientists’ research into residents’ experience has found some positive effects
 - More space (potentially) for green areas, good views, central locations, maintenance sorted by block managers, lower fear of crime
- ...and some negative ones including
 - Fear, stress, behaviour problems, low levels of interaction with neighbours
- Strong theme: high rises inappropriate for small children
- Much of this research done decades ago. Are findings applicable to today’s buildings? Are there design solutions?

9

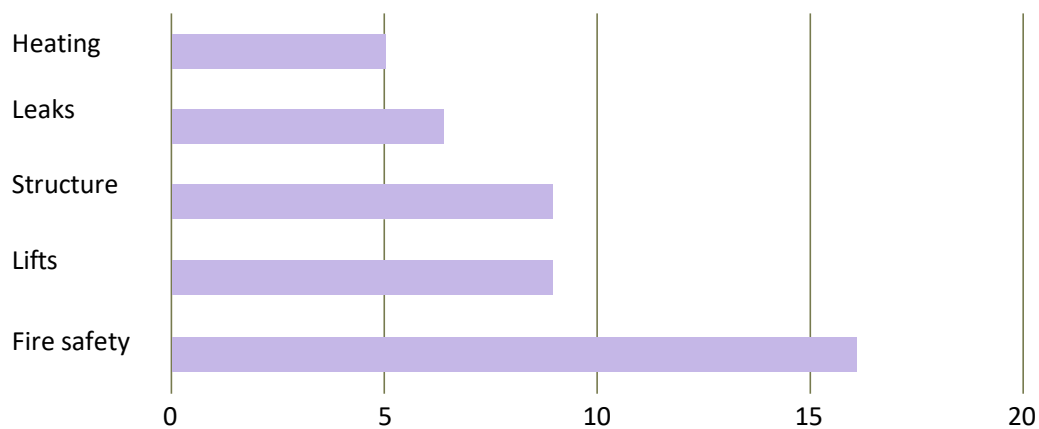
SERVICE CHARGES AND MANAGEMENT: FINDINGS FROM OUR SURVEY OF LEASEHOLDERS

- Currently no source of systematic evidence about leaseholder charges and what they cover
- Online survey carried out summer 2022. Respondents from 50 schemes, mostly London. High-density, not exclusively high rise
- Indicative picture:
 - Median service charge £208/month; range £80 - £750 (with one outlier of £3,000+)
 - 68% quite or very unhappy with scheme management. Main complaints: lack of responsiveness, little information about expenditure, poor workmanship

10

MAJOR ISSUES FROM LEASEHOLDER SURVEY

Long-term plans: >75% hoped to be living in a house in five years' time



11

TALL BUILDINGS AND PUBLIC OPEN SPACE IN LONDON



12

ACCESS TO PUBLIC OPEN SPACE AS A BASIS FOR HEALTHY URBAN LIVING

“Adequate open space for both recreation and rest is a vital factor in maintaining and improving the health of the people”

Patrick Abercrombie - The County of London Plan 1943-44

“Brockwell Park in Lambeth will be closed to the public on Sunday, April 5 to comply with the national guidelines on social distancing needed fight Covid-19.”

Love Lambeth

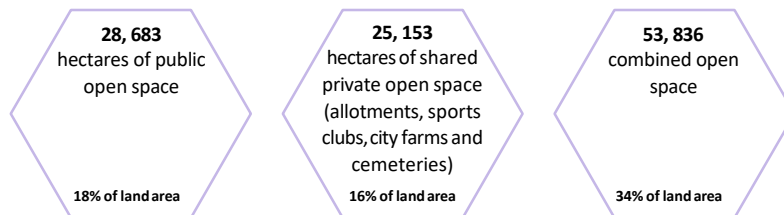


Brockwell Park - <https://www.landscapeinstitute.org/p1080200/>

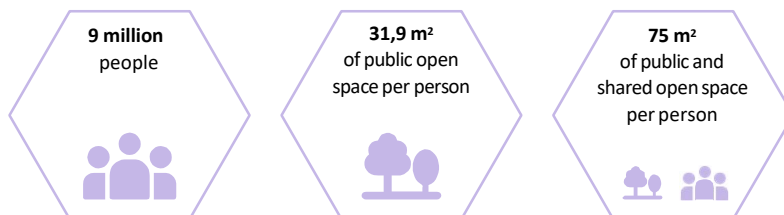
13

QUANTIFYING OPEN SPACE

How much open space does London have?



How much open space per person?



14

HOW IS LONDON'S OPEN SPACE DISTRIBUTED?

Borough	% of people in poverty	Open Space/ person	Average m ² / person
Tower Hamlets	39	17	
Newham	36	31	22
Hackney	29	17	
Bromley	17	259	
Richmond upon Thames	19	169	229
Havering	17	259	

Tower Hamlets has the greatest number of tall buildings in London's pipeline and Newham the fourth highest. Bexley, Bromley and Richmond have none.

15

HOW MUCH OPEN SPACE DOES LONDON NEED? London Plan 2021 – a raft of policies covering open space

“Open spaces are... a vital component of London's infrastructure”

- Policy S4 Play and informal recreation – developments to meet specific targets
- Policy S5 Sports and recreation – assess, protect and enhance
- Policy G1 Green infrastructure – assess, protect and enhance
- Policy G4 Open space – protect and expand “where possible”
- Policy G5 Urban greening – major developments to meet specific targets
- Policy G6 Biodiversity and access to nature – aim for net biodiversity gain
- Housing SPG Policy 3.5
- Neighbourhood scale – enhance provision of green infrastructure in the public realm
- Communal and public open space – provide new public open space to address deficiency
- Private open space – all developments to meet specific targets



Green Belt and Metropolitan Open Land

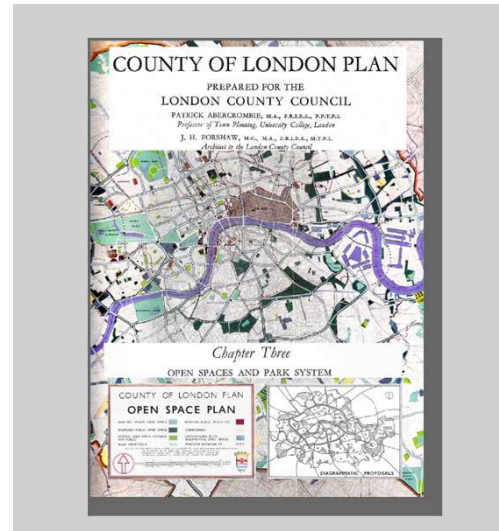
- Green Belt
- Metropolitan Open Land

Source: Borough Local Plans
Contains OS data © Crown copyright and database right (2018)

16

HOW MUCH OPEN SPACE DOES LONDON NEED? County of London Plan 1943-44

Patrick Abercrombie
recommended minimum 4
acres per 1,000 people
(16.2 sqm per person)
within half-mile (800m)
walk from every home

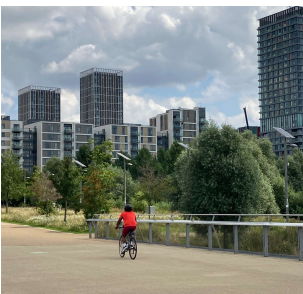


17

HOW MUCH OPEN SPACE ARE TALL DEVELOPMENTS PROVIDING?

Public open space per person in square metres

Queen Elizabeth
Olympic Park



Newham, Tower Hamlets, Hackney and
Waltham Forest

18 m²

King's Cross



Camden

2.57 m²

Vauxhall Nine Elms
Battersea



Wandsworth

0.78 m²

North Acton



Ealing

0.31 m²

18

WHAT NEXT ON OPEN SPACE?

- Expand this study and consult on it
- London-wide mapping of open space provision and deficiency
- Comprehensive database of the open space delivered by recent and current high-density development
- Post-occupancy evaluation of completed high-density developments and their impact on open space
- Consider the case for a minimum target amount of nearby public open space for every resident (and potentially every worker)
- Understand better the contribution of tall buildings towards meeting London's housing need

19

MAIN THEMES TO CONCLUSIONS

- No regulation on how service charges and sinking funds are set
- Inadequate framework to ensure leaseholders understand their rights and obligations
- No obligations on developers to provide information on lifetime costs
- Lack of understanding of the long term resilience of the new towers
- Building regulations and planning policy out of step with construction technology and challenges
- Issues about suitability of high-rise housing for people on moderate and modest incomes
- The need for more research on all aspects of high rise housing

20

RECOMMENDATIONS TO PROTECT LEASEHOLDERS

- Regulate the way service charges and sinking funds are set
- Require developers to provide a full lifecycle cost plan for high-rise housing schemes for planning authorities and purchasers
- Require freeholders to maintain the lifecycle cost plan provided by the developer
- Require the legal profession to establish best practice guidance for those acting as conveyancers to prospective purchasers

21

RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE THE DEVELOPMENT OF HIGH-RISE HOUSING

- Invest in development and application of innovative construction techniques, to improve whole-life performance – for example whole-wall systems provided by one supplier and guarantor
- Fundamentally reform Building Regulations to enable and encourage improved design and construction of high-rise housing
- Align Building Regulations, planning standards and insurance-backed guarantees
- Set up an independent body to research, test and certify construction products and assemblies
- Research wider social impacts of superdense housing and manage them through the planning system – for example by insisting on adequate open space

22

RECOMMENDATIONS AROUND TENURE IN HIGH RISE HOUSING

- Review the use of incentives that encourage marginal home owners to purchase high-rise housing
- Review whether development grant should be provided for family housing for affordable rent in high rise housing
- Discourage high-rise development for affordable housing and buyers on moderate incomes

23

RECOMMENDATIONS ON FUTURE RESEARCH

Government at all levels to promote and fund independent research to better understand:

- the satisfaction of residents in existing high-rise buildings and how it varies by tenure, household type and income
- the real costs of living in high-rise housing for leaseholders and how these are recovered
- options for building high-rise housing which reduce life time costs and carbon take

24

Q&A

