An exhibition exploring the design and delivery of the capital’s homes

A selection of housing projects by Partners of NLA
The Ferrier Estate — a tired GLC development of the 1970s currently being transformed into Kidbrooke Village
London’s population is growing and the capital needs to build around 36,000 new homes a year just to keep pace with the number of new households. This catalogue accompanies an exhibition by NLA — London’s Centre for the Built Environment, which looks at how well the capital is keeping up with its targets, who is delivering new homes, the funding and policy context, exemplar projects, and new and imaginative ideas for designing and delivering new homes for London.
The housing problem for London is simple but the solutions are complex: 7.9 million people (3.3 million households) live in the capital now, and that number is expected to grow to 10 million by 2031, creating an additional 700,000 households. We need 36,000 homes a year to meet this demand… but we are currently only delivering around 20,000 homes per year. In a period when there is just less money to go round, when prices remain high, mortgages are hard to come by, the demand for rental is growing yet the industry is not geared to deliver it, something’s got to give.

On top of that there are 880,000 people in London on council housing waiting lists, 224,000 households currently live in overcrowded accommodation and 35,000 households are classed as homeless and in temporary accommodation, three-times the national average.

51 per cent of homes in London are privately owned, but with the shortfall in housing provision, house prices remain high in the capital. The average age of a first-time house-buyer is now 32 – three years older than elsewhere in the UK. The average house price in London is now £364,000, 55 per cent above that of the average for England. As a result renting is growing. But we have a poorly regulated private rental sector where 39 per cent of accommodation doesn’t meet Decent Homes Standards. There has been a 50 per cent increase in complaints against private landlords over the past four years, yet the average private rent in the capital for a two-bed home now stands at £1,360 per month, two and a half times the national average. There is a real need for more quality accommodation in the rental sector but few developers are providing it.

The Montague Report, published in August, looked at ways of encouraging build-to-let and recommended waiving affordable housing requirements on new developments of homes specifically for private rent, setting up a task force to encourage build-to-let investment and allocating public sector land for build-to-let development. Following its publication, the Government announced support for the build-to-let sector, with £200m of funding and a £10bn debt guarantee fund to get the market moving.

Whether they are for sale or rent London needs more homes. The GLA calculates there are over 170,000 units in the pipeline, although there is no guarantee when or whether these will be built. The Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment carried out by the GLA in 2009 identified the scope for development across the capital. The total capacity for new housing on large and small sites was calculated to be 360,062 units – enough for ten years’ supply.

In spite of knee jerk public reactions against any tampering with the Green Belt, pressure is increasing to look at building in these protected areas – at 110,000 hectares, around three times the size of the city itself. If a third of it was built on, it could contribute over one million new homes. Much of the Green Belt isn’t so green – scrubby edges of ex-industrial estates and carved-up motorway-land could be regarded almost as brownfield sites. Whether we impinge on the Green Belt or not, we will need to look again at densities in the city if we are to maintain the current London Plan policy of locating all development within the GLA area.

The implementation of projects on larger available sites will make the biggest effective dent in the number of homes required in London. The London Plan identified 33 Areas of Opportunity, which typically have been projected to accommodate 2,500 homes. The London-wide capacity is 235,000 homes. A further ten Areas of Intensification have the capacity to provide a total of a further 14,300 homes. Some of these involve the redevelopment of failing post-war estates such as the Ferrier Estate in south east London now being transformed into Kidbrooke Village.

However, developers are warning that the new Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) will act as a deterrent to new developments being started. CIL is a charge placed on almost all new developments to generate revenue for essential infrastructure and is gradually being adopted across London. There are two CIL types: Mayoral CIL was specifically introduced to raise funds for Crossrail and is applied based on the benefits a borough can expect from this major new piece of transport infrastructure; and borough-level CILs to fund specific local infrastructural needs. Local CIL is set by local authorities and varies across the capital. Assessed by a panel of evaluators, the CIL cost is a figure per square metre of development space and is applied differently by each borough. Local CIL is chargeable on top of the Mayoral CIL, and in addition to any applicable Section 106 agreements.

There has been a lot of publicity recently surrounding the sale of homes to overseas buyers. In 2011, 60 per cent of prime homes in central London were bought by overseas investors, with 34 per cent of the prime market across the capital as a whole. In terms of new-build developments, 70 per cent of the prime market is made up of overseas buyers. In central London, 76 per cent of prime property in 2011 was bought by overseas purchasers as buy-to-let investments. Chinese and Asian Pacific buyers are particularly active in the new-build market. 66 per cent of purchases are for primary residence, although in central London the figure is lower at 46 per cent.

With over £18bn of net overseas money coming into London’s prime housing market since 2007, this investment has helped the new-build supply of housing in the capital. However, concern remains that the influx of overseas capital into London has pushed up house prices, limiting the opportunity to develop affordable homes as land values increase and supply is directed towards more expensive accommodation.

There is also a shortage of housing for older people; providing more accommodation in this sector will release under occupied homes for younger families. In addition, the population of Londoners over the age of 80 is projected to increase by 40 per cent over the next thirty years. By 2031, 352,000 people in the capital will be over 80. The Government’s agenda for housing this growing group was set out in HAPPI (Housing our Ageing Population: Panel for Innovation), published in 2009 by DCLG. It recognises that accommodating older people is a time-critical process – as we age, we have increasing social and care requirements, and we need to be planning and designing for this demographic shift now. However, the building of homes for lifetime adaptability and the
development of more specialist older peoples housing has been slow.

There is renewed interest in selfbuild, custom building and cohousing. Despite often being viewed as a fringe sector, self-builders contribute 20 per cent of new homes each year. In London, life for the self builder is complicated by the high cost of land at an average of £258,000 for a fifth of an acre compared to £94,800 in the rest of the country. Construction costs are also 18 per cent higher. Self building is not necessarily do-it-yourself. There are a variety of models: self build one-off homes, contractor-built one-off homes, kit homes, community collaboration or cohousing.

Cohousing groups in London include those like Featherstone Co-housing whose members are mostly in their 50s and 60s, who want to live around “like-minded people, sharing common ideas and practice about community living and sustainable housing” and the Hackney Co-housing Project made up of people who love living in Hackney and want to avoid moving out in search of cheaper housing. The Mayor of London has a fund of £8 million to support custom housing and community right to build and is seeking self builders to support.

New housing is delivered in a gallimaufry of forms – courtyards, slabs, towers and terraces. Boris Johnson has been keen to promote projects that reflect something of ‘London’s DNA’. The Mayor’s London Housing Design Guide proposed the establishment of a new vernacular for the capital: “London’s terraced houses, apartment buildings, streets, squares and the best of 20th century development have created highly successful residential environments with enduring appeal. This guide aspires to encourage a new London vernacular that can take its place in this rich fabric.”

The vernacular is not only reflected in form, it also delivers the sort of adaptability inherent in more traditional designs. Ideas around ‘long life, loose fit’ help ensure that new-build has a robustness that will survive changes long into the future. The Popular Homes project, set up by Urban Initiatives, addresses the issue of providing medium-density, ‘long-life, loose-fit’ housing, and proposes methods and mechanisms to speed up planning, achieve replicability with high design quality and open the housing market up to a broader interest group. It advocates the establishment of a fast-track planning system for housing based on a set of standard building types.

Such plans are part of a number of entrepreneurial endeavours to speed up delivery of housing in the capital. Complex regulations, many of them overlapping, are in desperate need of simplification. But balancing this with reducing costs, while maintaining quality, is a key issue. On the following pages we illustrate projects from Partners of NLA across a wide spectrum of types and styles, for a variety of occupiers, that set an encouraging standard for the future.
This project provides an opportunity to replace a vacant office block with a high-quality mixed-use building in the historic heart of Stratford Town Centre. The scheme consists of two separate buildings, one to the Broadway frontage (including two retail units), and the second at the rear of the site. Double aspect apartments are created by the insertion of a light-filled atrium at the centre of each building, with a green landscaped shared amenity space at the centre of the site. Gardens, balconies and terraces provide usable private outdoor space for all homes.

Leonard Street, EC2

The façade of this new mixed-use development facing onto Leonard Street has an elegant simplicity; its material palette consisting of artisan bricks and high-quality composite windows. The south façade overlooks a private courtyard and is more playful, with projecting balconies that afford views over the City of London. The penthouses are dual aspect with expansive open-plan living space that extends out onto a private landscaped terrace.

William Street Quarter Phase II, IG11

This is the second phase of a masterplan produced jointly between Alfred Hall Monaghan Morris and Maecomran Project for the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham and Laing O’Rourke to redevelop a site previously occupied by the 1960s Lintons Estate. The masterplan accommodates 201 high quality, mixed tenure homes (Level 4 of the Code for Sustainable Homes) including terrace houses, maisonette blocks and a tower, alongside new amenity spaces to replace the old estate.

Tollgate Gardens, NW6

Situated on the corner of Kilburn High Road this project replaces an existing late 1960s estate and is part of Westminster City Council’s Housing Renewal Strategy. A high level of community involvement from the residents has contributed to the emerging design. The plan for the site responds sensitively to the Oxford Road conservation area, reinstating the street frontage, and rises in scale to Kilburn High Road. Within the mixed tenure blind a variety of building characters are proposed responding to the neighbouring edges of the site. The apartments are designed to the Mayor of London’s Housing Design Guide, with the majority enjoying dual or triple aspect; each has a balcony or terrace.

Vermillion, Rathbone Market, E16

This £17 million residential-led mixed-use scheme comprises 660 residential units (25 per cent affordable housing), a 25,000 sq ft new Civic Centre and library and 10,000 sq ft of retail space. The scheme is part of a development agreement with the London Borough of Newham and contributes to the planned regeneration of Canning Town in east London. Phase 1 is now complete with 271 residential units having been delivered in 20 months using unitised cladding and modular pod construction.

Plot N02 Athletes’ Village, E15

The Athletes’ Village provided 1,784 beds for athletes during London 2012 and is now being converted for legacy use as new homes which will meet the Lifetime Homes Standard. Plot N02, designed by Lifschutz Davidson Sandilands, will accommodate approximately 300 apartments and is set around a raised courtyard; taking as its inspiration a familiar London typology of buildings set around communal gardens. As contractor on the project Ardmore Construction has pre-fabricated and installed 600 bathroom pods along with 202 balconies prefabricated by Ardmore’s sister company Paddington Construction Limited.
Greenwich Peninsula, SE10

The scheme consists of three blocks including a 19 storey (61 metre) tower, incorporating 229 apartments with two triplex luxury penthouses and two floors of car parking. There are 14 intermediate and shared ownership units (London and Quadrant Housing Trust are the RSL), 60 social-rented units and 169 private apartments. The scheme has been built using a traditional RC framed structure with a euro-clad and rainscreen cladding process. A CHP biomass boiler at ground floor level allows the scheme to meet a 10% planning target for onsite renewable energy generation.

Miccawber Street, N1

This mixed tenure development will provide 108 apartments and houses on an island site near the Regent's Canal in Hackney, with a substantial element of family housing. A seven storey apartment block on Wenlock Road will step down to five storeys to meet a terrace of 10 three storey houses on Taplow Street. The larger three bedroom family apartments are all on the lower floors and have terraces at the centre of the apartment block as well as balconies. All two- and three-bedroom apartments have a dual aspect. The scheme aims to meet Code for Sustainable Homes Level 4 and lifetime Homes standards.

Mildmay, E2

Mildmay is a mixed-use project, combining a variety of private and social residential units, a church, a commercial space and a hospital. The development is located close to the Shoreditch Triangle on land off Hackney Road. Genesis Housing Association is the main client and the project is funded in part by the Homes and Communities Agency. Felden Clegg Bradley Studios have worked with Matthew Lloyd Architects and East to prepare the masterplan and detailed design of the scheme, which is now under construction by main contractor, Ardmore Construction Limited, through its joint venture with First Base.

Paynes & Borthwick, NW1

Paynes & Borthwick is a riverside development providing 257 highly specified one, two and three bedroom apartments in a comprehensively landscaped setting. Ardmore will sensitively restate the listed building, construct a landmark residential tower along with art galleries, private gardens, underground car parking and 38,000 sq ft of commercial and retail space.

Stratford Halo, E15

Stratford Halo is a landmark regeneration project for Stratford: a residential-led, mixed-use development by Genesis Housing. At a height of 133.10 metres – a total of 43 storeys – the tower will be one of the tallest residential buildings in London. The scheme comprises the demolition of existing buildings on the site, the construction of six new blocks and the refurbishment of locally listed Warton House. It will provide over 700 residential units, studios and associated external works.

Wornington Green, W10

Wornington Green is the largest regeneration scheme in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea for decades. PRP has provided the masterplan for the overall redevelopment of the site and the detailed design for the redevelopment of the first phase of the scheme – Portobello Square – with Ardmore Construction Ltd the main contractor. The scheme has been designed to complement the rich architectural history of the area and reanimate historic links between Portobello Road and Ladbroke Grove. The new development will eventually offer up to 1,000 new homes to the area and a new London square will form the focal point for this new urban quarter.