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# Building in sustainability into higher density housing

Presentation to WCC Housing Commission  
June Barnes

 business for neighbourhoods

- The context
  - Sustainability
  - Good practice
  - Myths and realities
- Possible solutions and how to get there





## What is sustainability?

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- Sustainable development is about ensuring a better quality of life for everyone, now and for generations to come.
- A widely used international definition is 'development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' ('The Bruntland Report, 1987').
- Other simple definitions include 'not cheating on our children', and 'treating the planet like we intend to stay'
- For social landlords its about building housing that will last in neighbourhoods where people will want to continue to live



## The Government view of sustainability

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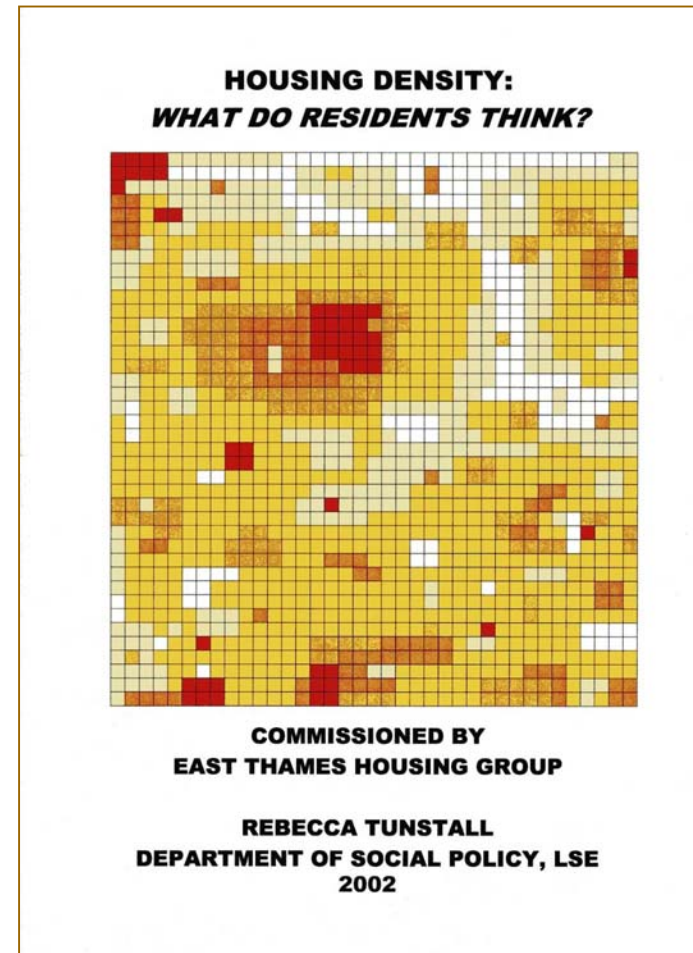
### Sustainable Communities: Homes for all

- Active, inclusive and safe – *fair , tolerant, and cohesive with a strong local culture and other shared community activities*
- Well run – *with effective and inclusive participation, representation and leadership*
- Environmentally sensitive – *providing places to live that are sensitive to the environment*
- Well designed and built – *featuring a quality and natural environment*
- Well connected – *with good transport services and communications linking people to jobs, schools, health and other services*
- Thriving – *with a flourishing and diverse local economy*
- Well served – *with public, private, community and voluntary services that are appropriate to people's needs and accessible to all*
- Fair for everyone – *including those in other communities, now and in the future*

## Good practice

### Housing density – what do residents think

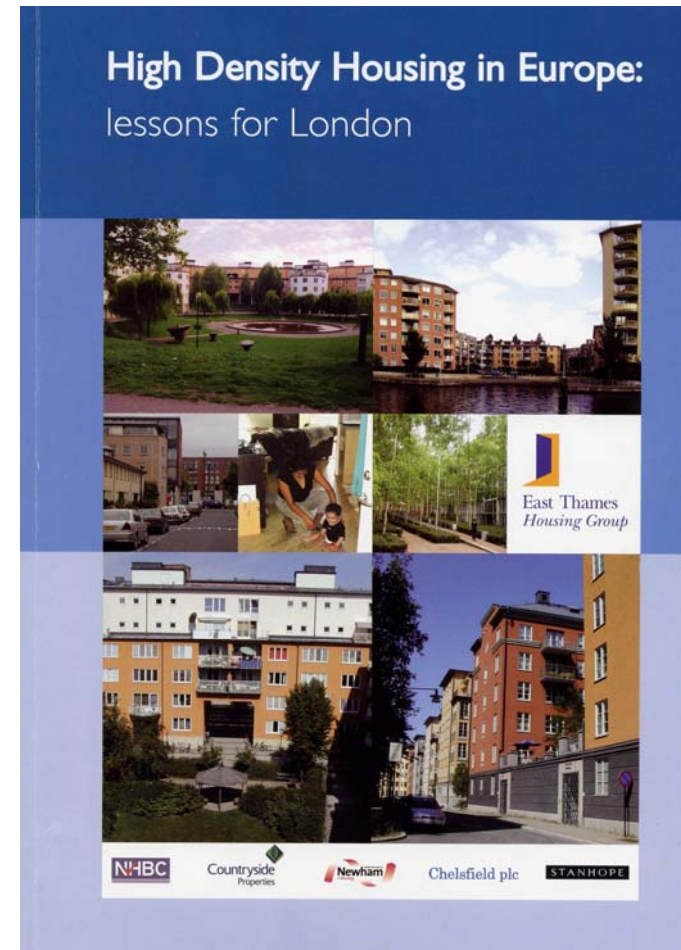
- High density is associated with high rise and with noise
- Residents attitudes and perceptions are complex
- People are not necessarily opposed to high density
- ‘Compact’ development is more acceptable
- Addressing residents concerns and aspirations becomes crucial



# Good practice

## Successful high density housing in Europe

- Involve long term players in the master planning with people issues and spatial issues dealt with together
- Focus on good quality landscaping
- Coherent long term management approached for the whole site
- Mixed tenure and household types
- Significant number of social tenants drawn from existing social housing schemes



# Density myths and realities

## Myths -

- High density works – look at Kensington and Chelsea and the Barbican
- High density housing is more cost effective
- Small households want smaller homes

## Realities –

- High density works where
  - People have choice
  - People have room
  - People go to work
  - People are affluent
  - The housing is well built and looked after
  - The public realm is well looked after
  - There aren't too many children





## Peoples concerns

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Research shows that some of the biggest barriers to increasing density are:

- Concerns about the impact on traffic and parking
- Local residents not in favour, out of character with the local area
- Concerns about the impact on local services
- Concerns about the lack of public space and play areas
- It is associated with problem families
- It is perceived to be ugly
- It is perceived to reduce house prices for current residents



## Peoples concerns

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Other concerns include:

- Long-term sustainability and popularity of the scheme
- Whether the design is sensitive to the area
- Intensity of use; robustness and quality of materials and finishes especially in communal areas, will it stand the test of time
- High levels of occupancy
- Child densities and the need for forethought in receiving large numbers of children on a scheme for example, the impact on health and schools services
- Approaches to lettings
- Will a scheme be effectively managed and maintained?



## Solutions

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- Build the right homes in the right place
- Build more family units and bigger homes generally
- Make sure the homes provided are affordable to a range of household types and incomes
- Make sure the infrastructure is right from flood attenuation, to public transport, to schools, to shops, to leisure facilities, to training and jobs, to the public realm and long term management
- Respond to environmental issues
- Build in long term flexibility
- Ensure that the funding is in place to keep the public realm in good order

## How - planning

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- Provide a planning framework which is specific about family housing and about suitable densities for different needs in different locations – densities to be much more in line with the Victorian inner suburbs
- Develop spatial and social master plans in tandem
- Recognise the difference between habitable rooms as a measure of density and think about people per hectare and lifestyle impacts
- Have less public open space and more private gardens and balconies and small parks
- Maximise environmental sustainability





## How – land and access to land

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- Reduce hope on land values and if necessary use CPO action more often
- Create a programme of public land being available for a range of tenures including family housing – giving public landowners positive incentives to do this including righting of debt and holding equity
- Make overage agreements the norm in the public and private sectors
- Look at long term land assembly with local authorities and housing associations and the private sector working positively matching statutory powers with financial clout

## How – the long term

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- Develop lettings and sales plans at master planning stage –
  - Be clear about who you want to house
  - Think about mix of units and household types and incomes
  - Think about child density and age ranges
- Pre-sell and pre-allocate giving people as much choice as possible and being able to respond to different household needs



## How – the long term

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- Give people a say in the design and running of communal spaces
- Establish community trusts to secure long term revenue funding to support community infrastructure and the public realm. Fund these from –
  - Community enterprises
  - Ground rents
  - Other secure revenue incomes

