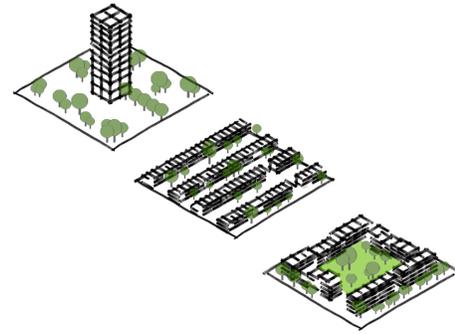


Lessons from London's High-Density Residents

Fanny Blanc, Kath Scanlon, and Tim White

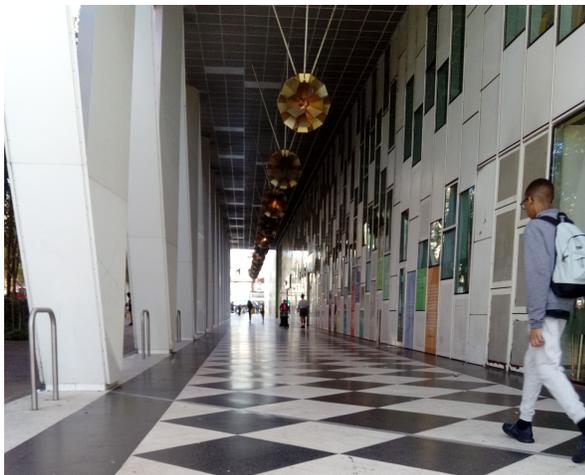
It is widely acknowledged that London needs more homes. The population in the capital is projected to rise to 9.3 million by 2021 - a 30% increase from 2001.



With the city's lateral expansion restricted by the Green Belt, new housing is being produced at unprecedented densities – a contrast to the low-rise, terraced houses and private gardens that characterise most neighbourhoods. While this new pattern has been widely discussed by policymakers, architects, planners, and academics, there has been little research involving residents themselves.

A project jointly led by LSE London and LSE Cities, with support from the Greater London Authority, has sought to understand resident experiences of life in London's high-density housing. We heard from over 500 residents from 14 high-density developments.

Our research highlighted **a few key issues and lessons to inform planners, designers, and academics**. Here are a few, and we hope you read the [full report](#) for the rest:



Community

It was clear that for the majority of residents the physical proximity engendered by high-density built form did little to encourage community. In choosing to move to these developments, residents cite transport links and price as far more important factors than place-based community. It remains to be seen whether this will change following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Lessons:

- The majority of schemes studied have high turnover rates. This poses a challenge for community-building, which planners should explicitly address.
- Circulation areas like lifts, corridors, and lobbies could be thoughtfully designed to encourage informal, spontaneous interactions between residents.

Neighbourhood

There is not only a lack of community *within* housing schemes, but also between new high-density residents and their surrounding neighbourhoods. Because people choose to move due to transport and service proximity, they do not necessarily prioritise neighbourhood interaction. On the flipside, new housing schemes bring sharp increases in population that strain local infrastructure and services; many respondents cited long queues at tube stations, difficulty getting GP appointments, and schools at full capacity.



Lessons:

- Designers can foster integration with the surrounding neighbourhood through pedestrian permeability and amenities that can be used by the wider community.
- Necessary improvements in neighbourhood infrastructure and services should arrive with the new residents, not years later.



Built Form

Perhaps surprisingly, residents' satisfaction with their housing has little relation to its aesthetic quality. The degree of density also does not correlate with how much they like their homes. Rather, a building's internal design and comfort are most important. Residents' most common complaints are overheating, excessive noise, and lack of storage space.

Lessons:

- Heating and noise concerns need to be explicitly considered at design stage and monitored once buildings are occupied.
- Designers should think creatively about how to provide enough storage space, particularly in flats designed for families.
- Buildings shoehorned into tightly constrained, irregular spaces must meet the highest design standards.

Amenities and Outdoor Space

Amenities and outdoor space are important to residents. Large schemes that provide a range of services, retail outlets, and open space seem to be more successful than one-off insertions into the existing urban fabric. Internal communal spaces and roof terraces are used little by residents in comparison to outdoor, public amenities.



Lessons:

- Street frontages should be active. Retail or commercial frontages should be provided only where they are likely to remain in use.
- Residents' day-to-day movements should take them through common spaces, to ensure that these areas are used and feel welcoming.
- In many cases, it may be better to open amenities to the wider public. Pooling resources from multiple schemes can encourage bigger and better facilities.

Conclusions

Overall, this study shows that 'dense' housing is relatively popular with residents, a finding that might be surprising to those accustomed to London's historically sprawling urban form. In fact, we found no clear relationship between resident satisfaction and the absolute density of the developments. Rather, it is the interaction between density, design, location, and people that creates a sense of place; the greater the density, the more important it is to get the other factors right.