



**PLACESHAPERS RESPONSE TO MAYOR OF LONDON  
DRAFT LONDON HOUSING STRATEGY  
DECEMBER 2017**

**1. ABOUT PLACESHAPERS**

- 1.1 PlaceShapers is a national network of community-based housing associations formed in 2008. Fifteen of our current members are London-based, comprising a diverse range of providers each with their own unique history. They are listed at the end of this response. Between them these housing associations own or manage almost 80,000 mixed tenure homes.
- 1.2 PlaceShapers individually work closely with their tenants, local authority partners and other local stakeholders to build homes and communities. In addition to adding to the supply of new homes and managing existing stock, our members invest heavily in wider community support. This includes supporting vulnerable residents (be that for example care and support for our ageing population, support for those with learning difficulties or resettlement support for young homeless people) alongside wider community services such as initiatives to facilitate social cohesion and services to support people into employment, including through apprenticeships and volunteering opportunities within their own organisations.
- 1.3 Details of our members and more about what we do can be found on our website: [www.placeshapers.org](http://www.placeshapers.org)
- 1.4 London-based PlaceShapers have built almost 9,000 homes since 2011/12, increasing our collective stock profile by more than 10% and often working in partnership with each-other or other housing associations to achieve this. And it's not just our larger members who are building – every single London PlaceShaper is expecting to develop significant numbers of homes over the next five years with a further 12,000 new homes planned throughout the lifetime of this strategy. Further GLA support will help us to do even more.

## **2. RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION**

- 2.1 This response is limited to general comments on the draft strategy and builds on useful discussions we have held with key GLA contacts. No doubt some of our members will respond individually and in so doing may in go into more detail on the impact of the strategy locally.
- 2.2 PlaceShapers' London-based members welcome the Mayor of London's draft Housing Strategy and are encouraged by his ambitions to tackle the capital's housing crisis and to provide all Londoners with decent and affordable homes. The need for truly affordable rented housing is key to London's future and, if anything, we consider that the strategy should be more biased towards supporting providers committed to delivering this.
- 2.3 In this light, we particularly welcome the additional funding for affordable housing investment through to 2021 and the minimum affordable housing target for specific London Housing Zones in which a number our members operate. Higher levels of grant funding for new homes will be key to solving London's housing crisis especially if we are to build truly affordable housing including more social rented homes. We are pleased that the Mayor acknowledges this as being essential and hope that he will continue campaigning for increased government capital investment in new social housing given the long-term housing benefit savings that could be achieved.
- 2.4 The recent announcement from Government of a long-term rent settlement, has provided much needed certainty for our members and we thank the Mayor for his work in helping to secure this deal. However, with a low-wage economy and continuing benefits freeze, our members are acutely aware of the affordability challenges that result from rent-setting decisions. This is especially the case with new homes where, even with internal cross-subsidisation, the level of grant available will directly impact on a scheme's viability as truly affordable housing.
- 2.5 Consequently, there needs to be flexibility in grant allocations with recognition that higher levels will be needed to achieve London Affordable Rent homes in high-value areas. This is particularly important given that a substantial volume of cross subsidy for current programmes is from commercial activity, principally housing for outright sale, meaning that delivery of many low-cost rented housing schemes is currently dependent on a model linked to the London sales market. How sustainable this strategy is for providers going

forward is a real issue given signs of a slowdown in the London sales market and uncertainty arising from Brexit. Without grant flexibility there will be an inevitable continuation of the trend to build in lower cost outlying areas and the resulting “doughnut” effect will see low-waged Londoners excluded from living in the city.

- 2.6 We are pleased to note the draft strategy’s emphasis on diversification and hope that this confirms a commitment to an ongoing role for smaller community-based providers wanting to build much needed homes in their local areas.
- 2.7 Small and medium sized providers such as our members are particularly well placed to unlock smaller sites, often being more disposed to develop such schemes as a result of our community roots, local relationships and track record of work with local SME builders. We hope that our expertise in this respect and the need to ensure such sites are open to smaller providers to develop will be acknowledged in the final strategy.
- 2.8 Of course, we and all housing providers cannot build new homes without the land on which to do so. We therefore urge the Mayor to use all his powers and influence to ensure that sites are made available for new truly affordable homes, including at higher density levels, that publicly owned land is set aside for social housing providers at less than market value, that planning obstacles are overcome and that private developers are obliged to make their S.106 affordable housing contributions.
- 2.9 In conclusion, our collective history and building record shows that PlaceShapers’ London-based members have a significant part to play in achieving some of the Mayor’s key strategic housing objectives. This includes the valuable contribution made by those of our members in consortia partnerships which we know you welcome and appreciate.
- 2.10 We have the ambition and capacity to do more and hope that we will continue to be seen as trusted housing association partners alongside others. We look forward to working with the Mayor’s team at City Hall and our local authority partners going forward to make this a reality.

## **London- based PlaceShapers (December 2017)**

1. Christian Action Housing
2. CCHA
3. EastendHomes
4. Gateway Housing Association
5. Hexagon
6. Islington and Shoreditch Housing Association
7. Newlon Housing Trust
8. Octavia
9. Origin Housing
10. Phoenix Community Housing
11. Poplar HARCA
12. Shepherds Bush Housing Group
13. Thames Valley Housing
14. Tower Hamlets Community Housing
15. Wandle