Newham London

WE ARE SHAPING.

WE ARE NEWHAM.

DESIGN.

People at the Heart
of Everything We Do
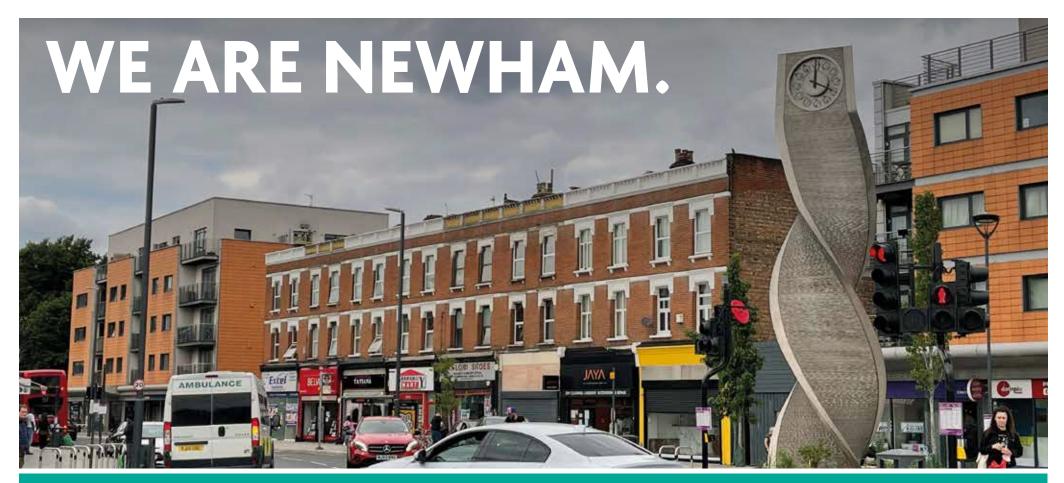
Introduction

The policies within this section cover what makes Newham special – its physical and social characteristics and aspirations, so that design solutions respond to and integrate with local places.

The design process is a key aspect of delivering successful places. It considers what buildings and the spaces around them look and feel like, and how usable, accessible and pleasant they are. A well designed development will:

- be easy to move around, with clearly defined public and private areas, with easily identified functions for its different parts: residential entrances, any commercial or community uses, open and green spaces etc.;

- feel safe and welcoming at all times; and

- enhance the look and functionality of the wider neighbourhood.

In order to deliver on a vision of cohesive, engaged, sustainable, happy and healthy communities, the policies in this chapter, the whole process of design must be considered, from brief development to post-delivery maintenance.

The current Local Plan policies that relate to this topic are:

- SP3: Quality Urban Design within Places;

- SP4: Tall Buildings;

- SP5: Heritage and other Successful Place-making Assets; and

- SP8: Ensuring Neighbourly Development.

What does our current policy seek to achieve?

SP3: Quality Urban Design within Places

- Coherent, connected and integrated places that successfully build on distinct local identities and opportunities for mixed use.

- Quality urban design that creates successful places and communities in terms of their popularity and stability, health, safety and security, sociability, inclusivity, cohesion and economic viability.

- Integrate and enhance the existing built and natural environment assets in the borough, and take the opportunity to correct past mistakes.

- Embed Secured by Design principles.

SP4: Tall Buildings

- Manage the location of buildings above 6 storeys (or 17.1m above ground), directing them primarily to areas with good public transport accessibility within town centres and strategic sites, and only where the new tall buildings would relate well to the local character.

- Require superior level of design to address the building's contribution to public realm, its appearance, materials and microclimate effects.

- Tall buildings, particularly where they exceed the height ranges set though the spatial strategy, must demonstrate added value compared to design solutions at lower heights.

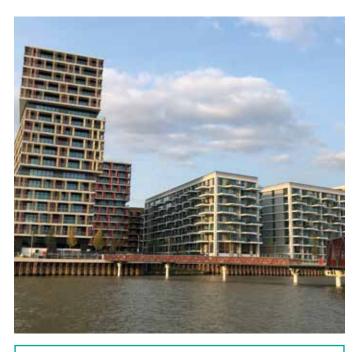### SP5: Heritage and other Successful Place-making Assets

- Protect and enhance both designated heritage assets and those more informally recognised, together with their setting.

- Designate Areas of Townscape Value, and notes where these may have potential to become conservation areas.

- Designate Archaeological Priority Areas as identified by Historic England's Greater London Archaeology Advisory Service (GLAAS).

SP8: Ensuring Neighbourly Development

- Follow the 'agent of change' principle: requiring the developer of the new use/development to remediate the potential negative impact on existing lawful uses before the development happens.

- Successfully integrate different land uses, optimising development opportunities in a way that is both neighbourly and proportionate to the scale and type of development.

- Consideration of health and wellbeing at the building, site and wider neighbourhood level, through the recommended use of the Healthy Urban Planning Checklist and Building for Life guidance.

What you've told us

- Crime and anti-social behaviour remain residents' biggest local concerns.

- Young people feel that their needs are neglected in both indoor and outdoor public spaces and Newham needs more locally accessible, free or affordable, safe and well-lit public spaces.

- Many of Newham's streets are too congested and do not offer a quality pedestrian experience.

- Cultural heritage is valued as much as the historic built fabric. There should be more public art and cultural events to celebrate the vibrant and diverse heritage of local communities.

- Residents were supportive of development that improves their local area and want to see more smaller-scale and granular development in particular.

- While development has brought positive changes to various parts of the borough, it has also created strong perceptions of physical and social division between what is perceived as 'new' and 'old'. There are concerns around who the developments are for and how the existing communities could feel part of the newer communities.

- There is a desire for more social spaces, animation and better maintenance of the public realm.

Sources:

- Newham, Annual Survey 2019

- GLA, Join the Docks - Royal Docks and Beckton Opportunity Area Framework engagement

- **Newham, Newham Heritage Month**

- **Newham, Newham High Streets Phase 1**

- Newham, We Make Newham Youth Assembly Event

What does the data tell us?

- Fear of crime has grown to 56% overall in 2019, and is higher amongst some residents, particularly those who are either disabled, female, over 75 years, Asian or Muslim.

- 88% of residents were satisfied with their local area as a place to live in 2019, up from 84% the year before. However, people who identify as having a disability were significantly less likely to be satisfied.

- The Newham Design Review Panel (DRP) framework has been effective at improving the design quality of the major schemes it considers, as measured by the GLA's Quality Review Charter. Appeals monitoring indicates Inspectors are generally supportive of the Local Plan design policies, with the only challenges relating to assumptions of unneighbourly development impacts of new housing in multiple occupation.

- The majority of tall buildings (above 6 storeys) approved since the current Local Plan was adopted have been on strategic sites and in line with the spatial strategy set out in policy. The one key area where tall building proposals continue to be proposed outside of a tall buildings area or strategic designation is related to the cluster of tall buildings at Western Gateway, by the Excel.

- There is a continued commitment to investment in public realm improvements through developer contributions as well as Council's capital investments.

- In London, 18% of privately rented homes fail to meet the decent homes standard, compared to 10% of social rented homes and 15% of owner-occupied homes. Roughly half of Newham residents live in private rented accommodation.

- Research undertaken into living standards in England during COVID-19 highlighted that the newest dwellings were experienced as the least comfortable during lockdown: Dwellings were progressively less comfortable the newer they were, with the most recently built homes (built between 2010 and 2020) recording the lowest proportions of comfortable residents.

- National research has also highlighted the risk of school closures widening educational attainment gaps, in part because of housing inequalities. Not all children will live in homes where they have the space, privacy, and quiet to do schoolwork.

Sources:

- Newham Development Management records

- Newham Annual Residents Survey (2019)

- **London Data Store: Housing in London**

- **Newham Design Review Panel Annual Report**

- Place Alliance: **Home Comforts During The Covid-19 Lockdown**

- Amy Clair at Institute for Social and Economic Research, University of Essex: **Homes, health, and COVID-19: how poor housing adds to the hardship of the coronavirus crisis - Social Market Foundation**

What are we required to consider and plan for?

The National Planning Practice Framework (2021)

- All development to demonstrate good quality of design that integrates into the site's context.

- The Council has a legal duty to enhance and protect conservation areas and listed buildings, and mitigate against harm or loss of heritage assets.

- The National Design Guide provides 12 key principles for assessing the quality of design.

- The National Model Design Code provides a framework of how the principles set by the National Design Guide should be considered at local level to inform decision-making and to create place-specific design codes.

London Plan (2021)

- Sets ambitious design standards reflecting latest best practice, including charters for recognition of high standards achieved, use of Design Review methods and guidance to enable delivery.

- Local Plans are required to undertake character assessments to support policies on design, particularly relating to design-led site capacity optimisation, and location of tall buildings higher than 21m above ground.

Relevant London Plan Chapters and Policies:

- Chapter 1 Good Growth, Objective GG1 Building strong and inclusive communities, Objective GG2 Making the best use of land, and Objective GG3 Creating a healthy city

- Chapter 3 Design

- Chapter 4 Housing

- Chapter 6 Economy, Policy E7: Industrial intensification, co-location and substitution

- Chapter 7 Heritage and Culture, Policy HC1: Heritage conservation and growth, and Policy HC3: Strategic and Local Views.

What new trends and objectives do we want to address?

- **Encouraging residents to be active in civil society through volunteering and community participation**, by improving development integration and opportunities for co-design. Newham has a track record of low levels of volunteering and civic participation, but, as identified in Newham's 'Social Integration Strategy' (2020), mobilisation during the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated that this can be turned around. Working in partnership with the Council, resident participation in co-design activities can help to transform our neighbourhoods for the better, bringing people together so that everyone can thrive. There are positive lessons to be learned from other councils who have invested into building resident's capacity to engage with development planning activities at every level, including through frameworks such as resident design review panels.

- **Supporting young people to feel safe, happy and cared for within the built environment.** Newham is a very young borough, with 24.4% of the population aged under 18 years, but half of children live in poverty and their economic and health and wellbeing outcomes are poorer than most other young Londoners. Independent mobility is vital for the physical, social and mental development and health of young Londoners. It is also intrinsically connected to equality and the everyday freedoms they have to access and occupy public space. Public realm is all the more important when our young people feel excluded due to affordability and distance barriers. As highlighted in Newham's 'Towards a better Newham – COVID-19 Recovery Strategy' (2020) we need to

address the quality of Newham's public realm to make it feel safe, address traffic and air quality, and improve the overall access to suitable and accessible play and recreation facilities within each neighbourhood. There is a wealth of research and best practice, on the added benefits of child-friendly design that we wish to explore and draw from, as well as drawing on feedback from our young people.

- **Newham is the most diverse borough in the country and a key focal point for growth in London.** Over the last ten years Newham's population has grown by 30%, and in the next ten years Newham will account for 30% of London's population growth. Newham also continues its historic trend of being welcoming to diverse cultures, with 72.5% of the population being from a Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic background, and over 100 languages being spoken. In spite of all this, development is rarely considered through the lenses of cultural needs, particularly in terms of housing quality and variety. We wish to explore how design solutions, particularly focusing on public realm and residential standards, could be implemented to support our resident's cultural needs and enable social integration.

- **Modern methods of construction (MMC)** are being promoted by government for example standardisation of processes and data integration and off-site modular construction. Following the impact of COVID-19 on the construction industry, uptake of MMC is increasing, particularly in relation to site construction logistics management. We are particularly interested in exploring the potential of new construction methods and technologies to help deliver small sites faster and more efficiently.

Sources:
- [Newham Community Wealth Building Strategy](#)

- [Towards a Better Newham Recovery and Reorientation Strategy](#)

- [Newham Social Integration Strategy](#)

- [Modern methods of construction; GLA: Making London Child-friendly](#)

- We Make Newham: Youth Assembly Event Findings Report 2021

What evidence will we use?

Characterisation Study

- Will identify the special characteristics which contribute towards each of our neighbourhoods' identities, so that we can require developments to consider and enhance these elements.

- Will set out recommendations of how to tackle Newham-specific design themes: for example living with higher density, managing impact of large scale infrastructure, activity and safety in public spaces, public realm offer for a diverse and young borough, air quality mitigation and juxtaposition of industrial and residential. In order to do this, the study will assess the suitability of existing national and regional guidance and identify where there is scope to develop more local design guidance.

Royal Docks Public Realm Framework (led by GLA's Royal Docks Team):

Focusing on the Royal Docks and Beckon Opportunity Area, the framework sets out the steps needed to deliver:

- Coherent connections across the area that will help to overcome physical and perceived barriers;

- An integrated and consistent approach to lighting, wayfinding, landscape and material palette to improve cyclist and pedestrian experience of the place and facilitate movements across the area;

- A comprehensive masterplan for the water as the foundation for its future accessibility and community and commercial use.

Streetscape Highways Design Guide (led by Highways team)

- This document sets design standards to assist delivery of high quality, safe and accessible public realm in Newham that promotes walking and cycling.

Proposed policy changes:

1. **Focus on the delivery of a network of public realm spaces that helps residents to live well within higher density neighbourhoods, enables social integration and celebrates diversity.** Options include:

   a. **A public realm net gain requirement,** addressing both quantitative and functional gains. Quantitative gains would be targeted at larger scale developments, and particularly those along key movement corridors and in town centres, and could be a requirement for a percentage of the overall floorspace. Functional gains could include improvements to design, greening, legibility and accessibility, and application of the Healthy Streets framework. Gains should also enable locally appropriate cultural representation (for example. through street art) and a sense of belonging and ownership by the full range of Newham's communities in public and semi-public spaces.

   a. **A public realm management plan requirement.** Particularly in large strategic sites where new public realm is often delivered under private ownership, it is important to secure good standards of long-term maintenance that preserve the integrity and quality of the public realm, allow for multi-functionality and adaption (for example street events), and monitor environmental performance (for example traffic and footfall, air quality, biodiversity, Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems). It could either follow the principles set out in the emerging Public London Charter, or we could develop a Newham-specific approach. This could be secured through a legal agreement linked to the planning permission (such as an s106 agreement).

2. Developing a network of child-friendly routes and spaces throughout the borough that reflect child and young people accessibility requirements, are safe, welcoming and diverse. These routes could make use of the opportunities presented by Low Traffic Neighbourhoods, although connectivity to key routes and public transport nodes will also require consideration.

3. Promote the co-design of major developments. Newham is committed to improving resident civic participation, and particularly to enable participation of young people in borough life, with enhanced representation in place and economy. Every opportunity should be taken for honest, open and transparent collaboration between developers, infrastructure providers and the existing communities that the development affects and caters for. Options include:

   a. Develop a set of co-design engagement standards for larger schemes, drawing on the Council's emerging Participation Framework. This is in keeping with the NPPF's recent introduction of the potential to require community engagement as part of a Design Code.

   b. To explore the potential for a Young People Design Review Panel that would work alongside the existing professional Design Review Panel and review schemes containing certain uses.

4. Provide Newham specific design guidance. We currently use national guidance, best practice knowledge disseminated through industry bodies, and London Plan guidance. Given the significant special circumstances of Newham, we wish to consider, through the Characterisation Study, the extent to which these serve Newham, and identify what further thematic guidance might be needed. Key themes explored include:

   - Promoting better health and wellbeing in the home, including potential new floorspace standards.
   - Optimising communal facilities in larger multi-unit developments, including potential new floorspace standards.
   - Delivering good design around and within tall buildings (above 21m).
   - Supporting multi-generational living and other culturally-representative housing standards.
   - Managing the juxtaposition of industrial and residential.
   - Imaginative forms of site activation at the street level.
   - Air quality improvements.
   - Environmental standards and methods of construction.

5. Require application of industry standards/frameworks, beyond current requirements for Secure by Design accreditation and BREEAM standards. Other frameworks could include TfL's Healthy Streets Toolkit, or the industry standard Building for a Healthy Life. Use of standard frameworks would provide a clear assessment and monitoring framework but would rely on their continued use and applicability.

You tell us

- **Do you agree with the proposed changes?**

- **Are there other changes we should consider?**

- **Is there anything missing?**

- **Are you familiar with any other building industry standards that we could consider?**

- **Should there be an expectation of 'public realm net gain' for major applications, and if so what should be the focus?**

- **What would you like to help co-design in your neighbourhood (for example, green spaces, streets, community buildings)?**

- **•How has the pandemic affected how you use your home and your perception of the quality of the space you have available?**