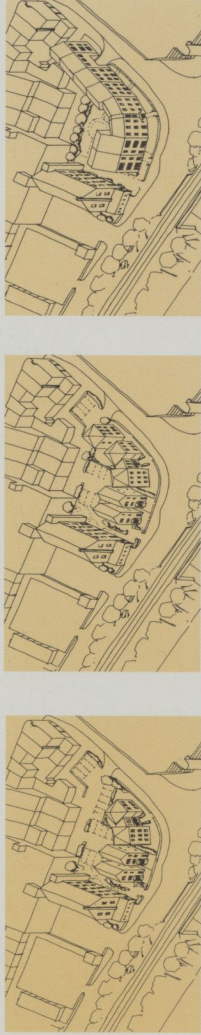


CON 76

Llewelyn - Davies

in association with
Urban Investment Partnership
London Research Centre
Savills



Sustainable Residential Quality : new approaches to urban living



DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT
TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS



GOVERNMENT OFFICE
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PLANNING FOR
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Sustainable Residential Quality (SRQ) is a new approach to urban housing potential, aimed at getting the most out of our cities and brownfield sites.

The SRQ report, which was published in January 1998, shows how we can be more positive and creative in planning urban housing.

Imaginative design, new ways of thinking about planning and transport, and better urban management can help us get more housing potential out of the towns and cities: and more than that, they can do it in a way that improves the urban environment, and makes patterns of living more sustainable.

The Government has explicitly endorsed this approach in the February statement on Planning for the Communities of the Future, and so the SRQ study can help authorities to adopt a more creative approach towards future urban housing.

This leaflet introduces the SRQ work, outlines its main findings, and gives contact details for further information.

Approach and Principles of SRQ

The central question that the SRQ study tries to answer is: how can new housing be accommodated so as to maximise its contribution to improving the quality of urban life and to fostering sustainable development?

The SRQ study integrates the analysis of urban housing potential with broader strategic concerns of fostering sustainable development and enhancing urban quality. It does this in relation to the potential for new housing on small 'gap' and infill sites of up to 1ha within 800 metres walking distance of London's town centres. Ten town centres were examined, involving a survey of sites with housing potential followed by a series of design studies, illustrating how these sites could be developed under different assumptions about planning policies and design standards.

Five main themes underpin the work:

- Taking a **positive** view: it is a basic tenet of the approach that urban housing capacity is an opportunity, not a threat. Using brownfield land sensitively can help us to rebuild and reintegrate our towns in ways which encourage more activity and life without leading to "town cramming".
- Relating housing potential to **accessibility** to public transport and local facilities: the SRQ study focused on housing potential in areas within a 10 minute walk of London's town centres (termed the "ped-shed"). In these areas residents can readily get to good services, jobs and public transport on foot or by bike.



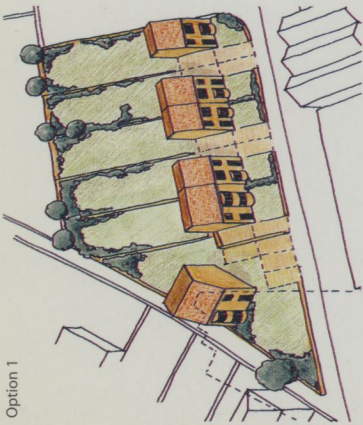
The ten minute walking catchment or "ped-shed" around Hounslow Town Centre within which residents have the opportunity to walk or cycle to work, the shops or public transport



Investment and imagination can help us make more of existing facilities such as urban parks. The study suggests that new development could contribute to improving such facilities through a local "community chest"

- Taking a **long term and imaginative** view: the surveys of housing potential were not constrained by issues of immediate land availability, viability or planning policy. The study looked beyond sites currently vacant to consider those that may be suitable for housing in future, particularly under-used sites. This is vital - a study which only looks at today's empty sites, without exploring future potential, will fail to identify the true extent of housing which could be realised.
- Using a **"design-led"** approach: the study did not just apply pre-determined planning standards to each site. Instead the study's urban designers explored a set of different design options for each of the 48 sites across London, demonstrating what could be achieved by varying assumptions about dwelling mix, density and car parking provision, whilst maintaining a high quality of amenity.
- Thinking about **urban management** measures which can work with the new approach: so that new planning policies do not work in a vacuum, but rather as part of complementary packages. Examples quoted include Neighbourhood Car Fleets and a "Community Chest" which could be used to fund and maintain improvements to pedestrian routes and small open spaces.

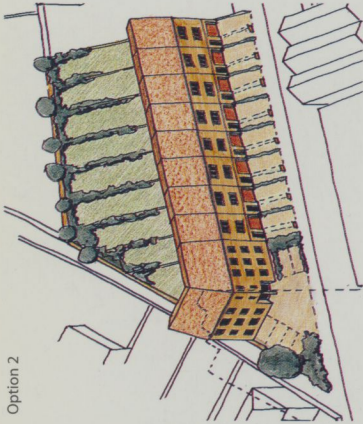
Option 1



What Current Practice gives you

- Suburban houses in an edge of town centre setting
- Front "garden" parking: harsh car dominated environment
- Density and parking policies mean only 6 (3 & 4 bedrm) houses and 14 parking spaces.

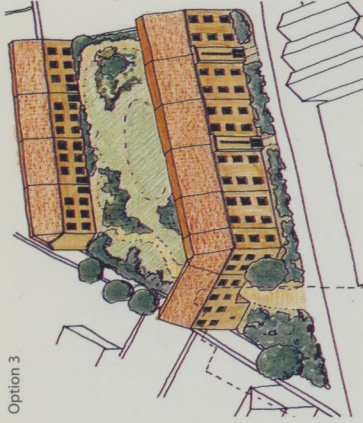
Option 2



Letting the Designers have a go

- Strong street frontage responding to town centre context
- Good surveillance of the street and private rear gardens
- Site potential increased to 14 (2&3 bedrm) houses and flats with 1 parking space per unit

Option 3



Car Free Urbanism

- High quality city living without town cramming
- No car parking but town centre and public transport adjacent
- Site potential increased to 32 (1,2 & 3 bedrm) houses and flats.

Three design concepts for the development of a small "gap" site on the edge of a town centre.

The Key Findings

The key conclusion of the SRQ study is that we can provide more housing in urban areas in ways which not only improve the quality of the local environment but also encourage more sustainable patterns of development.

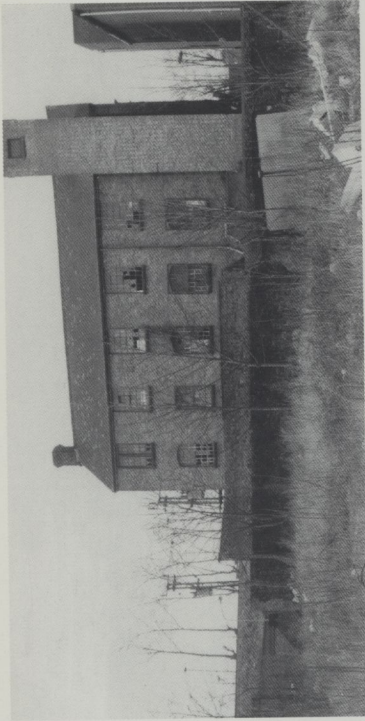
The main findings were:

- **the "ped-sheds" around town centres do represent a significant opportunity for new housing close to facilities and public transport.** In the ten case study areas alone, there was 36 hectares of land with potential for residential development. This is in addition to the potential for more housing from larger sites, (over 1 ha), flats above shops and the conversion of vacant office space into flats.
- **much of this potential is contained in the "interface zones" between town centres and their established residential or commercial hinterlands.** These zones, where the urban fabric may be fragmented by roads or large developments, contained 60% of the housing potential identified despite being only 15% of the ped-shed area.

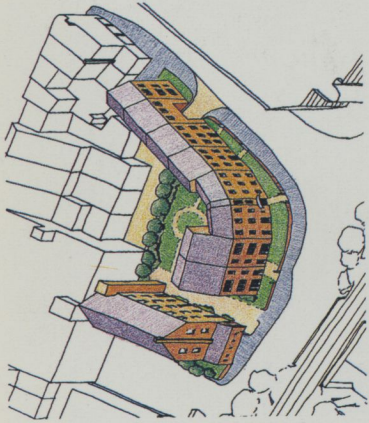
- **brownfield land capable of housing development is very diverse.** The majority of sites identified as having housing potential were small "gap" sites and under-used land. In contrast derelict and contaminated land or sites with really severe constraints were a small minority. Consequently bringing brownfield land into use does not automatically mean high remediation costs.

- **the majority of sites identified were small** - less than half a hectare (roughly an acre). Individually, they may seem insignificant, but collectively they represent a substantial housing resource. The study team concluded that focussed area-based strategies would be needed to realise this potential.

- **a design-led approach can make a real difference** to the potential released. The illustrative schemes in the SRQ study show that relaxing planning standards, whilst designing appropriately for the site and its surroundings, can increase by 50 per cent the amount of housing that a site can accommodate. Where car-parking requirements are removed altogether, the potential can often be doubled.



A derelict site in North East London



How the site could contribute to meeting housing needs and improving environmental quality

Government Support for the SRQ Approach and Report

The Government has commended the SRQ approach in the February Statement on Planning for the Communities of the Future.

The Statement expects local planning authorities "to explore the feasibility of and capacity for an increase in the density of development around town and local centres and other areas well served by public transport" (para.76). It explicitly refers them to the SRQ study, which "shows how combining an innovative design-led approach to building new homes with a more flexible approach to planning policy, particularly density and car parking standards, can unlock the full potential of sites for housing which the blanket application of standards often prevents" (para.77).

Thus the SRQ work can help authorities to adopt a more creative approach towards future urban housing.

Further Information

"Sustainable Residential Quality - new approaches to urban living" was published in January 1998 by the two organisations who lead London's strategic planning: the London Planning Advisory Committee (LPAC) and the Government Office for London (GoL). It can be obtained, price £48.00 inc p&p (CON 66), from LPAC at Artillery House, Artillery Row, London SW1P 1RT. Contact Adrian Dady on 0171 222 2244 Ext214 or adady@lpac.gov.uk for further details.

The study was carried out by consultants Llewelyn-Davies over the period November 1996 to October 1997. The project leader was Dr. Patrick Clarke. They can be contacted at Brook House, Torrington Place, London WC1E 7HN; phone 0171 637 0181 fax 0171 637 8740

The SRQ report is one of five LPAC/GoL sponsored research studies into additional sources of housing in London up to 2016, the others being:

- Offices to Other Uses (CON 65), published in October 1996.
- Possible Future Sources of Large Scale Housing Land in London, due to be published Summer 1998.
- Dwellings Over Shops, due to be published Summer 1998.
- One Person Households, exploring the housing preferences of one person households, and how they might relate to existing and future housing supply. Due to be published Summer 1998.

Further information on these studies and how to order LPAC publications is available on the LPAC Website: <http://www.lpac.gov.uk/>