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Author: Jules Pipe, London Deputy Mayor for Planning, Regeneration and Skills,
Greater London Council

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Planning for a Taller London



Jules Pipe

Interviewee

Jules Pipe, London Deputy Mayor for Planning, Regeneration and Skills
Greater London Authority
City Hall, The Queen's Walk
London SE1 2AA
United Kingdom
t: +44 207 983 4000
e: Jules.pipe@london.gov.uk
www.london.gov.uk

Jules Pipe is working on key priorities for the Mayor, including: major regeneration projects across the capital, providing young people with skills for their future careers, ensuring London's infrastructure needs are delivered to benefit all Londoners, and leading on revising the London Plan. Pipe has unrivaled knowledge of London government, becoming the first directly elected mayor of Hackney in 2002, and serving as Chair of London Councils since June 2010.

In the past decade, London has grappled with growing pains and critical questions about how its urban landscape should be developed. More than 200 buildings of 20 stories or greater were approved or under construction by the end of the Boris Johnson mayoralty. This provoked a strong reaction from a broad spectrum of the community, which founded the Skyline Campaign in 2014 to call for a sensible, managed approach to development that would balance priorities of development, preservation, equity and urban character. In May 2016, Sadiq Khan became the new Mayor of London, and made the review of the London Plan, the strategic document directing the city's development, a key objective of his administration, with impact on many of these issues. The New London Plan is out for public consultation through autumn 2018, and scheduled to be in force by 2019, until 2046.

The CTBUH Journal's Editor, Daniel Safarik, interviewed Jules Pipe, London's Deputy Mayor for Planning, Regeneration and Skills, the lead person in the new administration responsible for the revision of the London Plan.

What do you think of the Skyline Campaign (a multi-party lobbying campaign against "badly designed buildings in inappropriate locations")? Has it helped or hurt London economically, culturally, etc.?

Here at City Hall, we welcome the debate generated by the Skyline Campaign. While it is important to remember that this was launched during the previous Mayoralty, there is no doubt that it has stimulated some very interesting debate about tall buildings in London.

Do you think tall buildings are important to London's global competitiveness? Where should they be located?

London's skyline has been transformed beyond recognition in recent decades, and now many global corporations operate their businesses out of tall buildings. The Mayor and I believe that the city should continue to welcome such investment, showing that London is open to international business, trade and talent. We must, however, make sure that they are only built in suitable areas, contribute positively to the skyline and their locality, and if they are residential developments they should contribute to easing the capital's housing crisis. A draft version of the London Plan was made available in November 2017, which will include stronger policies to ensure new

tall buildings respect the character of existing neighborhoods.

What do you make of recent objections to buildings, that now rise behind, as well as in front of, landmarks such as St. Paul's Cathedral?

The Mayor is strongly in favor of development where it delivers the homes Londoners need, but this must be balanced with respect for the capital's heritage. The [United Kingdom's National] Government is devolving powers to the Mayor over consultation on buildings which appear in designated views. Under these new powers, Mayor Khan will ensure The Friends of Richmond Park, St. Paul's and Historic England are consulted if any further developments could impact on this view of the cathedral in the future. As part of this process, he will review the London View Management Framework more widely to avoid situations like this in the future.

How can London bridge the gap between its substantial shortfall in affordable housing and its restrictions on tall buildings?

The Mayor has been clear that solving London's housing crisis will be a marathon and not a sprint. Affordable home delivery was at near-standstill when Mr. Khan took office. In 2016, the previous mayor delivered



Manhattan Loft Gardens, London. © Roy Abid

the lowest number of new affordable homes since current records began back in 1991 – just 4,880 – and left a legacy of just 13% affordable homes coming forward through planning permissions granted under his watch.

Since then, the Mayor has been working hard to put the foundations in place towards delivering the affordable housing London needs. He recently secured a record US\$3.96 billion deal from Government to deliver 90,000 genuinely affordable homes over the next five years. He has also released new planning guidance, which sets out how affordable housing will be boosted through the planning system towards Mr. Khan's long-term goal of half of new homes being affordable.

The London Plan has never contained a presumption against tall buildings, but has always set out that tall building projects needed to be not only well designed, but also in the right place.

How do you feel about the argument that the many tall luxury residential buildings are “safe deposit boxes in the sky” and represent an antisocial visitation of global capitalism upon the city? Should there be more regulation of these types of buildings, or stronger requirements for affordable housing/ mixed-income projects?

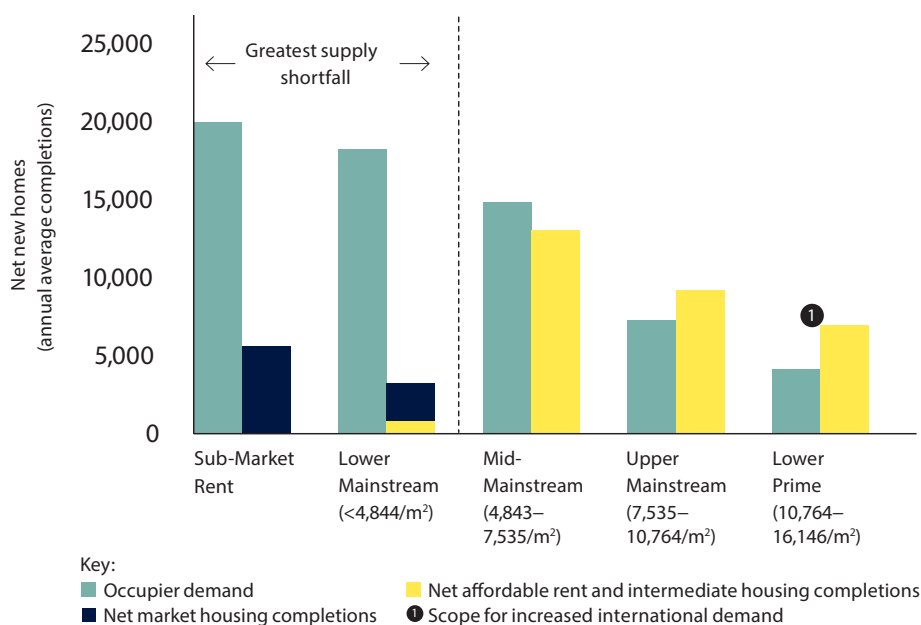
London is open to people and investment from around the world. We welcome people from all countries who want to make the capital their home, and we welcome international investment that can be crucial in kick-starting the building of new homes.

At the same time, many Londoners have real concerns about new homes being left empty and the fact that this may be linked to those which are bought off-plan by overseas investors. It's time we took a closer look at the issues surrounding overseas investment and found out the true impact on London's housing crisis.

We are pleased that the London School of Economics has agreed to lead on this



Manhattan Loft Gardens has been criticized for marring background views of St. Paul's Cathedral.. © Paula Redmond. Source: Architect's Journal



London housing completions five-year forecast for 2017–2021, showing huge shortfall in lower-priced housing and increased international demand for upper-end housing. Source: Savills Research, Moliur, Oxford Economics

important research, which is set to be the most thorough investigation of its kind in the country and will provide a much clearer understanding of this complex issue.

Tall social housing in the UK has been stigmatized for a variety of reasons, most starkly in the wake of the Grenfell Tower disaster. Is there opportunity for a new kind of social housing that better reflects contemporary needs?

Estate regeneration has an important role to play in London, offering the chance to improve the quality of homes, including those in tall buildings, together with open space, and to increase the number of new and genuinely affordable homes. The Mayor has been clear that local residents must be at the heart of estate regeneration in the

capital, and that is one of the core principles of his good practice guide, which he is consulting Londoners on.

Should there be a pan-London tall buildings strategy, as proposed by the Skyline Campaign, including a 3D interactive model? Who should pay for and maintain it?

The Mayor is determined to work closer than ever before with the London boroughs to ensure a strategic approach to the positioning of tall buildings in London. A 3D model has already been developed for large parts of London, which we have used to assess tall building policy in key Opportunity Areas. This has provided a useful tool for engaging with local communities on the potential impacts of tall buildings, as well as

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proving a useful tool for negotiating with developers.

Broadly, how do you think tall buildings can or will fit into your vision for the new London Plan?

There is no doubt that tall buildings that are well-designed and in keeping with their local settings do have a role in London. The new London Plan, will include stronger policies to ensure new tall buildings respect the character of existing neighborhoods and explores how we can increase density to build more homes for Londoners.

In the current London Plan draft out for review, there are quite a few controlling descriptions of buildings that are qualitative rather than quantitative. How will words like “attractive” or “interesting” be enforceable when future applications come before the Mayor?

Planning decisions have always involved assessing the qualitative as well as the

quantitative aspects of a development. However, the new London Plan places greater importance on design quality than the current Plan. Policy D2 details how good design can be delivered, and this will help the implementation of other policies, including on tall buildings.

Do you expect that the Fire Safety policy guidelines will be updated or changed pending the outcome of the Grenfell Tower inquiry? Would the deadline for consideration of the London Plan be pushed back if new information should emerge from the Grenfell case?

No, the London Plan timetable will not be pushed back, as this would risk the whole Plan not being adopted in this Mayoralty. There is always a changing landscape of Government policy and other factors, and we can deal with these changes through an Examination in Public or an alteration to the adopted plan, if necessary.

But please be assured that Policy D11 requires that development proposals must meet the absolute highest standards of fire safety. They do not state how this should be achieved or specify construction methods, products or materials. But developers would be expected to justify their choices and how their proposals satisfy the very highest standards.

Proposals should therefore take into account information which may emerge following the public inquiry or the independent review of the building regulations, or any future changes to standards or regulations.

It seems that final discretion on tall building height and location is devolved to individual boroughs. Is this a change of practice? How does the issue of one local borough making a decision that affects a city-wide dimension, such as view corridors, get resolved?

The current policies require boroughs to determine where tall buildings may be appropriate. The new policy is clearer that boroughs need to identify areas where tall buildings are acceptable in principle through the plan-making process. When identifying these locations, boroughs will need to assess the impact of other policies in the Plan – such as those on strategic views – and ensure there is no conflict. ■

