Great expectations or hard times?

As the most powerful player in the London planning regime, all eyes are on Sadiq Khan as the new Mayor settles into City Hall. But what the Dickens can we expect to see? Kathryn Hampton takes a look at the Mayor’s top planning priorities and reviews what he has done so far.

Bleak House

Housing is a top priority for the new Mayor. He pledged to ensure that 50% of new builds in London are affordable and has already increased provision in schemes such as Barking Riverside (where the target increased from 28% to 35%) and Old Oak Common, where Khan imposed a 40% requirement.

The new Mayor is looking to deliver a higher rate of affordable housing on public land schemes and is reportedly willing to see lower returns on TfL land to secure increased housing. However, with recent figures showing that social housing construction is at an all-time low, Khan is going to have to work hard to ensure that the bricks are laid, if he is to achieve his target.

Khan wants to ensure that more housing is “genuinely affordable” and a revised definition of “affordable” is expected in new planning guidance this Autumn. Deputy Mayor for Housing, James Murray has said that the definition will include “social rent, London Living Rent and shared ownership”.

The Mayor has also committed to “getting a better deal for renters” and it is thought that his office will be fighting for a build to rent exemption from the starter homes requirement.

The Mystery of Viability Assessments

Sadiq Khan has also switched his attention to viability assessments submitted with planning applications, which have been blamed for restricting affordable housing provision and over-complicating the planning process. The Mayor has called for greater transparency and is currently considering the introduction of a fixed tariff to replace affordable housing contributions.

A 35% tariff has been mooted as a possible solution and the intention is that the fixed rate will be set at a level which incentivises developers to choose the tariff system over the viability assessment route. It will not necessarily mean an end to viability assessments, but James Murray hopes that the tariff system will be popular due to the certainty and speed that it will offer.
Our Mutual Friend works on public sector land

The Mayor’s office is already working on changes to the London Plan and we can expect to see revised policies to push public sector building and increase affordable housing. The Mayor has committed to “building new homes on land owned by the Mayor, including Transport for London land, and bidding to develop other public sector land”. He has already released a piece of TfL land for development in Kidbrooke, and is expected to insist that half of all homes built will be affordable.

In an effort to increase public land development, Khan has pledged to find new sources of investment and there have been calls for relaxed lending for local authorities and housebuilders. We may also see the new Mayor fighting for the retention of central taxation receipts, such as SDLT from London homes, to fund new housing.

The Battle of Life: Making London “Liveable”

Described as one his key aims, we expect that in addition to housing, this will involve increased local employment initiatives and a focus on public spaces and air quality.

The Mayor’s public consultation in July included new proposals to combat air pollution and his amendments to the London Plan will introduce stronger policies on: tall buildings, the green belt, public spaces and empty homes.

The Long Voyage made shorter: Improving Infrastructure

Khan is committed to improving infrastructure, which he cited as one of his “foremost priorities”. The Mayor pledged to plan for new transport infrastructure, including Crossrail 2 and extensions to the DLR and Bakerloo lines. He said that he will “involve business in decision making on key issues of policy and planning, from skills and housing costs, to transport infrastructure”.

Conclusion

The new Mayor has already started to shake up the planning system in the Capital. He has Great Expectations for housing and is keen to see the end to Hard Times for Londoners. We wait with Old Curiosity to see how he puts his plans into action.

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