



London

Places for London: a publicly owned real estate company spearheading a greener, kinder, more connected city

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- **DURATION**
Ongoing Since 2022
- **POPULATION 2024**
9.748.000 (Growth rate 1,04%)
- **URA SCOPE**
ECONOMY. Urban Prosperity Beyond GDP STRATEGY. Shared Vision
- **TOPICS**
SUSTAINABILITY
AFFORDABILITY
INCLUSIVITY
REGENERATION
- **MAIN ACTORS**
Places for London

Cities around the world that are experiencing success face a significant challenge: the escalating crisis of affordability and sustainability. This issue affects everything from housing to small business spaces and offices, creating mounting pressure. As these cities prosper, they unintentionally become more segregated. Wealthier residents and thriving businesses occupy prime locations, pushing poorer citizens and smaller enterprises to the outskirts—into neighbourhoods that are more isolated, have fewer amenities, and offer diminished opportunities.

Amid this ongoing struggle, one vital resource is often overlooked: publicly owned land. Many cities have large areas of land and buildings that are underutilized and scattered across various public entities. Unfortunately, limited capacity and poor coordination among these groups have left this resource untapped, hindering efforts to address the affordability and sustainability crisis.

In London, a bold experiment is underway—a transformative approach to make use of the city's underused public land. In this pioneering initiative, neglected spaces such as car parks, railway yards, station precincts, bus garages, and engineering sites are being reimagined. These areas are being transformed into vibrant mixed-use, mixed-income, and sustainable developments.

The goal is to create affordable, low-carbon homes, workplaces, offices, and independent retail units in locations that are well-connected by public transport.

Places for London, initiated by Transport for London (TfL), is a collaborative platform that helps public bodies in the city utilize surplus land and buildings to tackle London's affordability and sustainability crises. Initially focused on TfL's surplus land, it now works with borough councils, Network Rail, and other stakeholders to maximize asset potential.

This approach is transformative for London, as it reclaims overlooked land to create mixed-income, low-carbon neighbourhoods with affordable homes and workspaces. Strategically located for easy access to public transportation and amenities, this model could serve as a powerful example for cities worldwide if successful.

It presents a blueprint for transforming underutilized public land into thriving, inclusive, and sustainable communities. With Places for London at the forefront, the capital demonstrates that even in the face of pressing urban challenges, innovation and collaboration can lead to a more equitable and sustainable future.





Impact

Places for London is transforming urban development by converting underutilized public land into vibrant, mixed-use communities. So far, it has begun construction on over 4,500 homes across London, with 1,000 already completed. Some of these projects focus on providing 100% affordable housing, promoting equality and urban safety through initiatives such as gender-inclusive design.

Committed to sustainability, Places for London introduced a Sustainable Development Framework in 2021. This framework includes measurable sustainability KPIs and is open source to encourage carbon reduction across the industry. By adhering to these principles, the organization has achieved a 54% reduction in operational carbon emissions in its residential projects, earning it a GRESB 5-star rating and making it one of the top-ranked organizations in the UK since 2021.

As London's largest landlord for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), Places for London plays a vital role in supporting local businesses. During the COVID-19 pandemic, it took the initiative to waive rents during lockdowns, providing essential relief. Recent projects include transforming historic railway arches in Kilburn into a dynamic hub for small businesses. Their Heart of the City program, launched in 2023, offers sustainable business training to tenants.

To tackle the growing skills shortage in the construction industry, Places for London is committed to developing a diverse and inclusive workforce. Through its comprehensive construction skills program, the initiative has trained over 7,300 Londoners since 2019, equipping them with the skills necessary for careers in urban development. The program has helped 2,775 individuals secure employment, contributing to a more resilient and capable workforce for the future of the city.

By prioritizing diversity, the program ensures that people from all backgrounds have access to training and employment opportunities in one of the most critical sectors for London's growth. This focus on inclusivity not only supports the city's economic development but also creates a more equitable opportunity for individuals who may have previously faced barriers to entering the construction field.

The Challenge

London faces a range of interconnected challenges that threaten its long-term sustainability and inclusivity. One of the most pressing issues is the **shortage of affordable housing**, with rising demand pushing many residents into distant, less connected areas. This affordability crisis extends beyond housing, affecting **workspaces** and **small businesses**, which are often forced to operate in less accessible locations.

The city also struggles with **ageing infrastructure**, which requires significant investment to maintain and upgrade, ensuring it meets the needs of a growing population. This challenge is compounded by the need to reduce **air pollution** and improve the city's **environmental sustainability**, particularly as urbanization accelerates.

Another major issue is the **skills shortage** in the construction industry, which hampers the ability to meet the demand for new homes, workspaces, and infrastructure. This shortage creates a barrier to creating a more resilient workforce and limits the pace of urban regeneration.

Finally, **economic inequality** and **lack of inclusivity** remain persistent challenges, as wealthier citizens and businesses occupy prime locations, leaving poorer communities and small firms at a disadvantage. These social and economic divides exacerbate the city's growth pains, hindering efforts to create a truly inclusive and connected urban environment.

Solution Proposed

The initiative aims to address key challenges in London, including housing shortages, aging infrastructure, social inclusion, and air pollution. It focuses on improving workspaces, shops, and railway arches to make them greener and safer while supporting small businesses.

Thousands of affordable homes are being developed alongside new workspaces, shops, parks, and community areas to enhance accessibility and serve the diverse needs of Londoners.

The initiative aims to deliver affordable housing, workspaces, and support to 40,000 Londoners, achieving tangible benefits for communities across the city. Sustainability is a core focus, with a commitment to achieve Net Zero Carbon across operations and head office and to set ambitious targets for all new developments. Furthermore, it seeks to increase its contribution to London's economy by 20%, strengthening the city's economic resilience.

Building on years of work initiated by Transport for London, the project collaborates with commercial partners and local communities. By addressing practical needs and creating safe, inclusive, and sustainable spaces, it is transforming London into a greener, more connected city, while positioning land and property as tools for lasting positive change.