

**From  
City  
to  
Room**

**A  
manifesto  
for  
better  
living**

**Mæ**





**TO**

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## Four priorities



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This book represents an introduction to the integrated thinking that we believe is necessary to solve today's urban, social and environmental challenges. It aims to demonstrate, in simple terms, a number of ways to create better places, better buildings and better homes, and takes as its premise the journey from large scale to small — from the city to each individual room.

Consistently, we find that success, when looked at on a macro or micro scale, can be achieved by overcoming challenges with social, sustainable and spatial solutions, all of which we promote in our design work for clients and in our policy work for government.

Alex and the team at Mæ

## The challenge

**Decades of underprovision, combined with unprecedented population growth, mean that supply is low but need is growing. Inequality is increasing, which creates the need for more justice and fairness in our society through public policy and inclusive design. Buildings have to work more efficiently than ever before, both in terms of their uses and the resources they use.**

**And the pressures of climate change mean sustainability is no longer an add-on but the starting point for any discussion about how, where and what we build. So how do we overcome these challenges? And what can we do to give people the homes, buildings, neighbourhoods and cities they deserve?**



# 1 Resilient cities

Profit from a sense of place

Make do and mend

Don't be dense — be intense

**Our towns and cities are complicated beasts that spread, stretch and sprout over time, and as populations and needs change, different types of buildings and developments go in and out of style. But as we move further into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, we need to think carefully about what kind of towns and cities we want to create, and to realise that successful cities must be resilient, able to withstand or recover quickly from the multiple challenges we face. So how do we create resilient cities? What do we need to do on a large scale to make sure neighbourhoods, buildings and homes reach their full potential?**

**We believe resilient cities depend on three key factors: the creation of a sense of place; a willingness to work with what is there already; and intensity. All these factors can be brought together through integrated design, which represents the effective problem solving that our towns and cities need.**

## Profit from a sense of place

**Successful towns and cities rely on the creation of successful places, by which we mean local communities that can incorporate the many and varied facets of an individual's life.**

Whether reimagining a brownfield site or rejuvenating a run-down neighbourhood, it is our responsibility to provide such places using a range of social, sustainable and spatial solutions. Social solutions prioritise the inclusion of a range of social groups, encourage a vibrant local culture and provide effective local governance through participation and leadership. Sustainable solutions consider the long-term environmental and economic impact of each new place. And spatial solutions include thoughtful planning, provision for a mix of uses and connections through transport and technology.

Such places not only provide a better quality of life for their residents and workers; they are also ultimately more profitable, because they increase the social, environmental and cultural value of the land, both in the short and long-term.

A strong relationship to the River Brent, the industrial history of the site and a proximity to Brentford High Street allowed us to create a rich and varied neighbourhood at Brentford Lock West. Expressive, wharf-like architecture helps create a place that feels embedded, drawing on the DNA of the area. A deep loggia creates outdoor rooms to be furnished, planted and enjoyed.

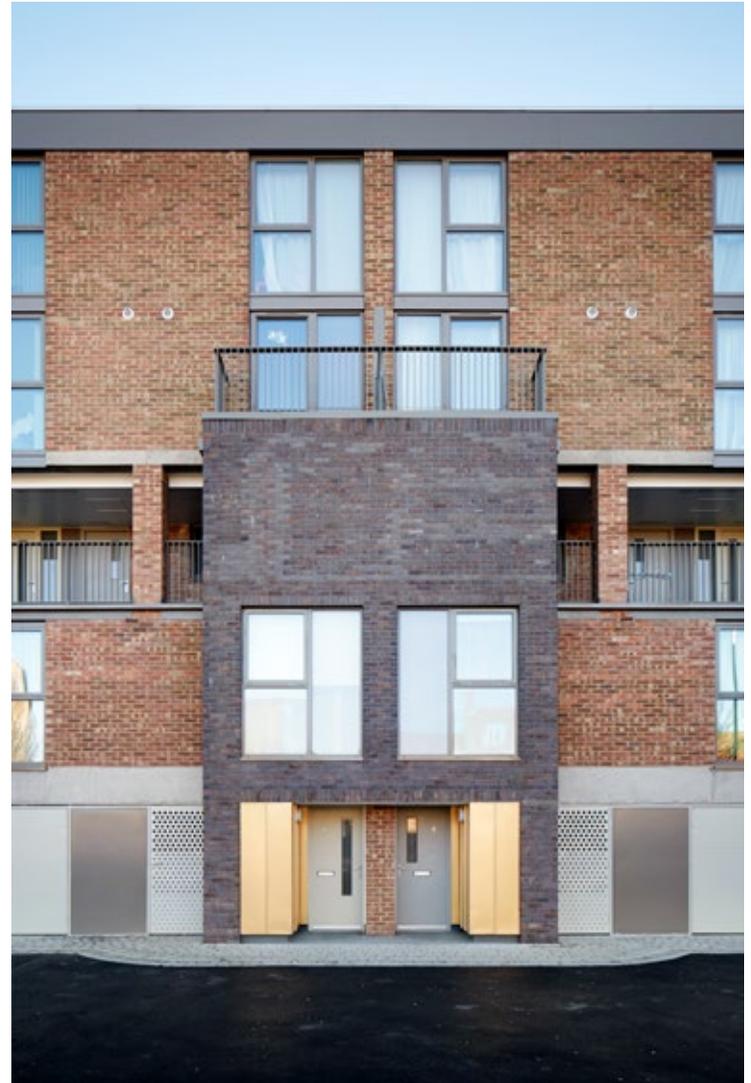


## Make do and mend

**As architects and designers, we are always happy to create new buildings, but are also open to the idea of using existing stock wherever possible, in the knowledge that it makes good social, environmental and financial sense.**

To this end, we have created three approaches for transforming housing estates that don't necessarily rely on knocking everything down and starting again. Where there is community demand or sufficient inherent virtue, you can 'refurbish' estates by reusing and renovating existing stock; 'reinforce' them by infilling as a means to intensify and sustain a neighbourhood; or 'remodel' them to positively regenerate. Each approach aims to improve the quantity and quality of housing, and to improve the life chances of those who live there.

Post-war housing can still have value and at Hillington Square in King's Lynn, where there is a strong sense of community, we calculated that refurbishment — fixing the underlying urban design problems and upgrading the building fabric — would deliver better value for our client and residents than full redevelopment. We always explore the unique potential of the brief to deliver the best solution.

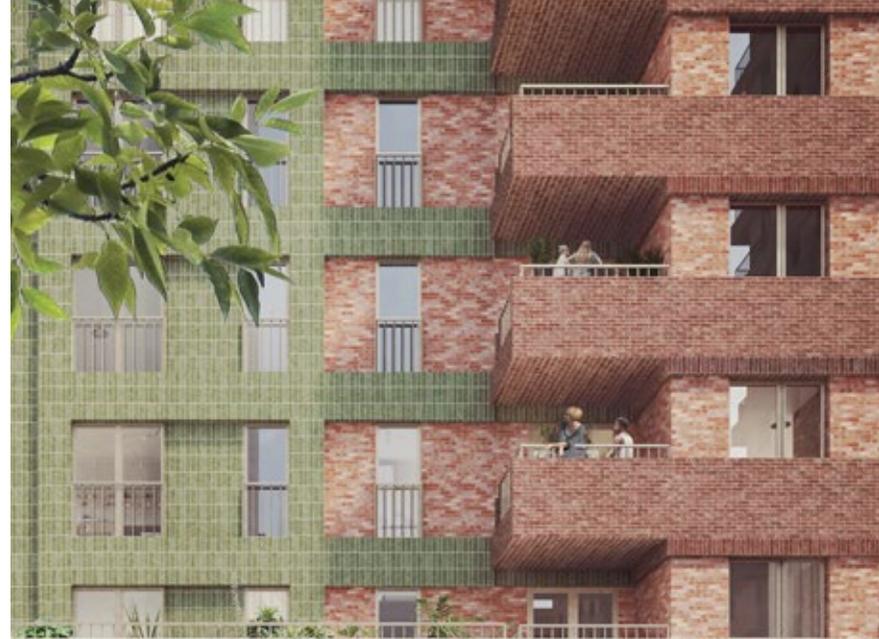


## Don't be dense — be intense

**There is much talk of density in urban design, of squeezing as many people into a site, but we believe that intensity is more critical.**

If you create a lively mix of ground-floor uses, good local amenities and social infrastructure with well crafted public realm, then our towns and cities can support much greater densities successfully. This requires integrated design, an approach that understands how each development fits into the wider city. But it must be done in a way that engages with the very specific needs of a place's context and its people, as well as a clever and considered use of space.

Popular places still need help. At Church Street, Westminster, we are revitalising a rundown neighbourhood by creating new homes and enhancing a much-loved market with a vibrant mix of enterprise spaces and retail to attract people and investment. The mixed-tenure scheme delivers high levels of affordable housing, driven by a long-term vision of good place creation.



We undertake research into new models of urbanism. Our research for the GLA into 'the future of retail and housing' analyses the future of the high street and tenures of housing, finding ways a complexity of uses can harmoniously coexist.





## 2

### Diverse neighbourhoods

Find the story

Mix and match

Free the spaces in between

**No single part of the city exists in isolation. Each building must respond to its context, whether its environment, its neighbours or its historical setting.**

**To create a diverse neighbourhood, it is first necessary to spend time understanding the story that lies behind each area, both the social groups and economic uses to which the area has been put. Next, it is our experience that cities need a variety of built form to strengthen local character and to meet a variety of needs, so different buildings need to be mixed and matched carefully.**

**With these two factors in place, the neighbourhood can then become a place where a broad range of people of differing ages can find their own space to live, work and play.**

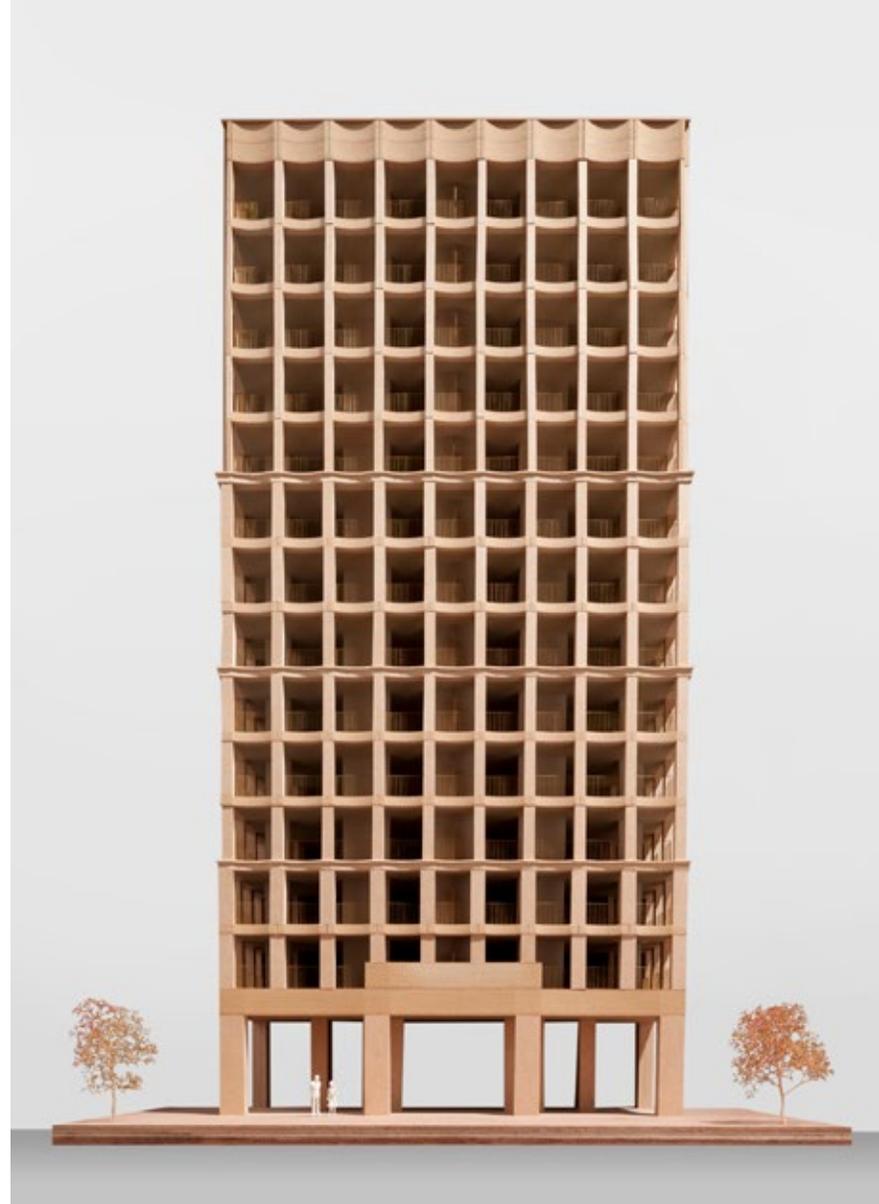
## Find the story

### **What is special about the piece of the city you are developing? What is unique?**

The intensity and variety of a town or a city evolves over time. Distinct social groups, trades or industries coalesce in certain areas, giving them a character and history entirely of their own. This context can be understood in terms of how an area feels as well as how it looks or functions, and has an inherent value that can be used and reused over time. Whether undertaking refurbishment or urban renewal, every site will have some fabric and memory worth preserving and enhancing, and discovering the DNA of a site is the best way to unlock its true potential.

Work that is sensitive to local life, location and culture helps to increase the desirability of a development and leaves a positive legacy for decades to come.

Found seashells on the river shore provided the inspiration for the scalloped façade of the landmark park-front building at Royal Wharf. The shells of oysters, historically a staple food of dockers in the area, were discovered when excavating the dock walls. In addition, the tide is expressed in the striated cast masonry columns, which form a continuous loggia around the building.



## Mix and match

**A 'one-type-fits-all' approach to developments leads to the sort of monolithic and soulless neighbourhoods that continue to blight our towns and cities.**

To ensure the sort of economic sustainability that can counter this blight, when creating a city block, mix different types of buildings with consideration for social and physical infrastructure and the planning of complementary functions. This focus on designing 'total architecture' creates successful places that rely on the rich mix of uses necessary to sustain urban life.

When adding retail or workplace into the mix, make sure they respond to the reality of an area; its demographic and needs. Remember, each part of the city is unique.



A place of many types became the starting point for a new masterplan at Grahame Park in Barnet. Terraces, villas and mansion blocks form the building blocks of a new, large neighbourhood planned around an existing park and woodland. Each type is reimagined for our time, creating sustainable and spatially rich homes connected by streets and public space intended to promote civic life.





## Free the spaces in between

**Are you creating somewhere people will want to live? It seems like a simple enough question, but the ability to answer it will determine the success or failure of a neighbourhood.**

Put simply, the more desirable a place is, the higher value it will have. In a desirable neighbourhood, outside is as important as inside. Variety, in terms of massing, typology and materials, will give an area its own identity but streetscaping is key, and so too the public realm. Spaces in between buildings become just as important as the buildings themselves; trees and parks matter as much as concrete and glass. 'Walkability' is paramount, so think about how you might feel when you pop out to the shops, whether you can return home from the bus in safety at night or where you might take the dog to stretch its legs.

An enhanced riverside walk and shared streets create a pedestrian priority neighbourhood at Brentford Lock West where the landscape is designed to complement the architecture and the layout designed to optimise access and views to the river. Alongside well-designed homes, the generous shared gardens, social spaces and private outdoor spaces create a place where people can be proud to live.





When designing new projects, we closely observe the link between indoors and out, between building and landscape, to articulate and enhance connections between public, communal and private spaces, using visuals as well as physical and BIM models to test ideas.



### **3**

## **Flexible buildings**

Build for the future

Do more with less

Encourage civic culture

**One thing that people can agree on in the future of our built environment is the inevitability of change: change to our environment due to global warming; change to our city centres as shopping gives way to a return to civic use; and change in the way we work as we enter the era of artificial intelligence.**

**To accommodate that change, buildings need to be built for the future, which means making them flexible enough to accommodate their use by different social groups. We must do more with less, creating environmentally friendly buildings that decrease carbon use. And we must configure spaces so that they encourage social cohesion and provide opportunities for people to meet and share their lives.**

## **Build for the future**

**To build for the future, we must create buildings that are more efficient, use less resources and are faster to build, by manufacturing more components off-site and making more use of renewable materials such as engineered timber.**

But to guard against obsolescence and demolition (an all-too recurrent theme of the past half century), we must also make buildings flexible, which means they can accommodate different uses over time. This 'long-life, loose-fit' ethos can be facilitated by the careful configuration of internal space and services and by the use of technology, such as BIM, to make their ongoing management easier with digital modelling and surveillance.

Factory produced, sequestered carbon timber wall panels and bricks made from recycled waste define the form and expression of the arts and community centre at Sands End, Fulham, as well as underpinning the strong environmental credentials of the building. The venue offers flexible space and encourages the community to be flexible in its use; future-proofing it for decades to come.



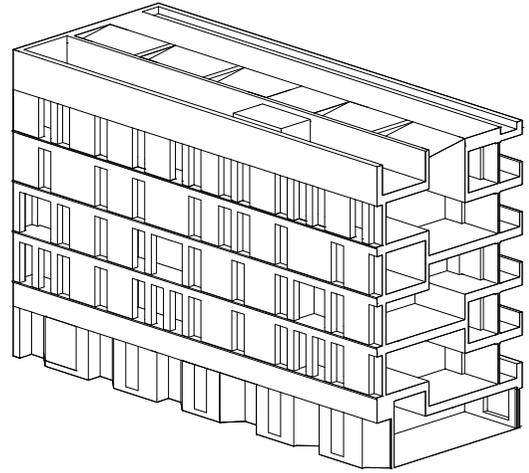
## Do more with less

**The creation of an environmentally friendly building does more than just tick a sustainability box; with integrated design, a high-performing building can deliver more accommodation on less land that is more energy efficient and uses fewer resources.**

We understand that reconciling environmentally friendly design with high-density urban design is challenging; good solar aspect and minimal overshadowing are not always compatible with tightly knit networks of streets or a considered response to the local urban grain. But it is possible to marry good urban design practice with environmentally sound practices. Simple techniques, including well-insulated, airtight construction, along with triple glazing and heat recovery of mechanically ventilated air, can significantly reduce a building's carbon footprint.

Addressing issues of fuel poverty was the driver for a brief from Camden Council to design the UK's largest Passivhaus project at Agar Grove. An existing estate is intensified to deliver 493 homes to optimise the use of this central urban site and deliver homes to exceptional environmental standards that are both efficient and spatially diverse.





## Encourage civic culture

**In integrated design, the choice of materials, proportion and composition of a building that contribute to its decorum and rhythm derive from factors that include the building's use, how it responds to the climate and the construction technique.**

But any building must respond to civic culture, and in doing so negotiate the sometimes fraught relationship between the individual and their social group, something that can be achieved through the careful configuration of space, such as the provision of generous shared space to improve communal life and social cohesion.

Simple spatial solutions can make a person feel more comfortable and safe in their environment and include techniques such as having a room looking onto the street to allow a kind of community surveillance, or placing importance on the relationship of the threshold, a space between the front door that allows a transition from public to private realm.

An enhanced public park, a new square and new community centre offer social infrastructure alongside new housing at Regent's Park Estate, Camden. When designing infill development for 122 new homes across a number of under-used sites, we prioritised improving facilities for the benefit of both new and existing residents of surrounding properties, thereby winning support for change and improving the urban realm.







4

## 4

### High-quality homes

Listen and be heard

Find the right fit

Create delight

**As we move from the scale of the city to the individual, the best way to create houses and apartments that people are happy to call home is to make sure they are high-quality. That means actively listening to residents from as early as possible in the development process; addressing their specific needs; and creating spaces that are not simply functional and flexible, but offer delight as well.**

**Importantly, for our practice it also means actively campaigning for improvements in the way that our homes are built by working with government, setting the agenda and writing policy that promotes quality for the long-term future.**

## Listen and be heard

**Listening speeds up the process of building and delivers better outcomes, the most important of which is the creation of a building where someone will want to live or go to work every day.**

Listening is an active process that requires the development of strategies for engaging with residents, neighbours and potential users, as well as the ability to balance expectations of what might be delivered. At its best, listening can get people on your side by involving them in the decision-making process.

A new centre of life intended to overcome individual loneliness and exclusion was our brief at Morden College, Blackheath. The new day centre is intended to make life more inclusive, more social and less lonely, improving the quality of life and sense of normality in older age. Working closely with our client and residents the spaces are shaped around their needs and social patterns.



## Find the right fit

**High-quality homes can contribute to a better quality of life, but not everyone's needs are the same.**

The kind of housing a person needs will depend on whether they are a tenant or homeowner; old or young; in a single-parent, nuclear or extended family; how rich or poor they are; or whether they have any disabilities. It is therefore an important part of the design process to understand specific people's needs and then try to accommodate them.

The number of 'oldest old' — those over 85 — will more than double in the next 25 years and, with half of British pensioners looking to downsize, we need to create homes fit for their needs. Somerleyton Road, Lambeth, offers homes for independent living enhanced with small shared spaces for neighbourly encounter as well as large communal spaces, lounges and gardens for all.



## Create delight

**The quality of our surroundings has a direct influence on the quality of our lives, so intelligently designed homes are more attractive and healthier than those that have not been thought through.**

That means we need to create layouts that are easy to live in, not just easy to build, and those spaces need to create a sense of wonder and delight. Think larger windows for more natural light; generous balconies that function as both an additional room and protection from the sun; and flexible living rooms with clear sight lines from throughout the home where we can relax, socialise, work or study.



Designing quality homes remains at the heart of what we do, so with each project we seek to advance our understanding of what makes a good home. Vaulted roofs, roof gardens, large balconies and light-filled, dual-aspect apartments define our canalside regeneration project at Brentford Lock West.



Space standards study: we undertook empirical research when drafting the Mayor of London's Housing Design Guide. This seminal work was subsequently adopted for the nationally described space standards.

	Kitchen <small>See key to kitchen items</small>	Dining <small>Living area calculated as a proportion of kitchen, dining and kitchen</small>	Living <small>Optional kitchen living/dining</small>	Double	Twin	Single	Bathroom	Storage/Utility	Outdoor Amenity Space	Net Internal	Circulation	Partition walls above 1%	GIA <small>(inc. amenity)</small>	Circulation Layouts <small>Notes for reference to floor height and usage (BHKBD)</small>
1-person	 6.2 sq.m	 14.4 sq.m dining area 11.9 sq.m	 12.0 sq.m			 Bedroom 9.8 sq.m	 Bathroom 5.8 sq.m	 Storage 10 1.0 sq.m	 6 sq.m	33.5 sq.m	1 Level Flat + 1.3 sq.m	2 sq.m	37 sq.m	 <small>area based on circulation area 6.5-10 sq.m</small>
1-bed, 2-persons	 6.8 sq.m	 15.4 sq.m dining area 13.9 sq.m	 13.0 sq.m	 Double Bedroom 12.0 sq.m			 Bathroom 6.8 sq.m	 Storage 10 1.3 sq.m	 8 sq.m	47 sq.m	1 Level Flat + 6.3 sq.m	2.5 sq.m	50 sq.m	 <small>ground level 1st level 2nd level kitchen circulation living circulation area 10 sq.m kitchen circulation living circulation area 20 sq.m</small>
2-bed, 3-persons	 7.8 sq.m	 17.2 sq.m dining area 14.7 sq.m	 14.0 sq.m	 Double Bedroom 12.0 sq.m		 Single Bedroom 9.8 sq.m	 Bathroom 6.8 sq.m	 Wheeled chair WC WC shower 2.7 sq.m <small>required on entrance level for multi-level units</small>	 Storage 10 2.0 sq.m	35.5 sq.m 54.5 sq.m	1 Level Flat + 4.5 sq.m	3 sq.m 3.5 sq.m	41 sq.m 77 sq.m	 <small>ground level 1st level 2nd level kitchen circulation living circulation area 20 sq.m kitchen circulation living circulation area 20 sq.m</small>
2-bed, 4-persons	 7.8 sq.m	 17.0 sq.m dining area 15.5 sq.m	 14.0 sq.m	 Double Bedroom 12.0 sq.m	 Twin Bedroom 10.0 sq.m		 Bathroom 6.8 sq.m	 Wheeled chair WC WC shower 2.7 sq.m <small>required on entrance level for multi-level units</small>	 Storage 10 2.0 sq.m	58 sq.m 60 sq.m	1 Level Flat + 6.3 sq.m	3.5 sq.m 4 sq.m	70 sq.m 83 sq.m	 <small>ground level 1st level 2nd level Alternative stair configuration</small>
3-bed, 5-persons	 8.2 sq.m	 17.0 sq.m dining area 15.5 sq.m	 14.0 sq.m	 Double Bedroom 12.0 sq.m	 Twin Bedroom 10.0 sq.m	 Single Bedroom 9.8 sq.m	 Bathroom 6.8 sq.m	 Wheeled chair WC WC shower 2.4 sq.m <small>required on entrance level for multi-level units</small>	 Storage 10 3.0 sq.m <small>Option Utility Room</small>	71 sq.m 72 sq.m 72 sq.m	1 Level Flat + 10.3 sq.m	4.5 sq.m 5.0 sq.m 5.0 sq.m	86 sq.m 96 sq.m 102 sq.m	 <small>1 Level Flat: 70-100 (Bx2) = 24 sq.m 2 storey houses: 83-12+ (Bx4) = 57 sq.m 3 storey houses: 87+4 = 91 sq.m 3 Level, 6-persons 1 Level Flat: 90-100+12 = 92 sq.m 2 storey houses: 107-16+12 = 103 sq.m 3 storey houses: 113-16+12 = 103 sq.m 4 Level, 8-persons 1 Level Flat: 88-12+ (Bx2) = 92 sq.m 2 storey houses: 10-12+ (Bx2) = 100 sq.m 3 storey houses: 102-12+ (Bx2) = 106 sq.m</small>
4-bed, 6-persons	 8.8 sq.m	 18.4 sq.m dining area 17.9 sq.m	 15.0 sq.m	 Double Bedroom 12.0 sq.m	 Twin Bedroom 10.0 sq.m	 Single Bedroom 14.0 sq.m	 Bathroom 6.8 sq.m	 Wheeled chair WC WC shower 3.4 sq.m <small>required on entrance level for multi-level units</small>	 Storage 10 3.5 sq.m <small>Option Utility Room</small>	81.5 sq.m 82.5 sq.m 82.5 sq.m	1 Level Flat + 13.3 sq.m	5.0 sq.m 5.5 sq.m 5.5 sq.m	99 sq.m 107 sq.m 113 sq.m	 <small>1 Level Flat: 88-12+ (Bx2) = 92 sq.m 2 storey houses: 10-12+ (Bx2) = 100 sq.m 3 storey houses: 102-12+ (Bx2) = 106 sq.m</small>

## Selected projects



### CAUDALE

Client: London Borough of Camden  
 Location: Camden  
 Date: 2013-2018  
 Value: £3m  
 Description: HS2 replacement homes on the Regent's Park Estate — 3 town houses and 5 apartments, plus a new public garden.



### HILLINGTON SQUARE

Client: Freebridge  
 Community Housing  
 Location: King's Lynn  
 Date: 2011-2015  
 Value: £30m  
 Description: Refurbishment of a 1960s housing estate, improving the standard of housing and quality of life.



### CHURCH STREET

Client: City of Westminster  
 Location: Westminster  
 Date: 2018-ongoing  
 Value: N/A  
 Description: New homes and market square as part of a masterplan development and improvements to the public realm.



### KIRKFELL

Client: London Borough of Camden  
 Location: Camden  
 Date: 2013-2018  
 Value: £4m  
 Description: HS2 replacement homes on the Regent's Park Estate — 13 new maisonettes, community centre, public square and community garden.



### GLA HOUSING SPG

Client: Greater London Authority  
 Location: N/A  
 Date: 2018-2019  
 Value: N/A  
 Description: Housing guidance document to support the new London Plan.



### LISSON ARCHES

Client: City of Westminster  
 Location: Westminster  
 Date: 2013-ongoing  
 Value: £14m  
 Description: Landmark elderly-person (HAPPI) housing scheme business enterprise.



### BRENTFORD LOCK WEST

Client: Waterside Places  
 Location: Brentford  
 Date: 2013-2018  
 Value: £50m  
 Description: 157 new homes as part of a large regeneration project on a brownfield site beside a canal.



### GRAHAME PARK HUB

Client: London Borough of Barnet and Genesis Housing Association  
 Location: Barnet  
 Date: 2016-2017  
 Value: £13m  
 Description: New health centre, nursery, cafe and community space for the Grahame Park residents.



### GRAHAME PARK PH 1

Client: London Borough of Barnet and Genesis Housing Association  
 Location: Barnet  
 Date: 2014-2017  
 Value: £280m  
 Description: Redevelopment of a 1960s estate to create three neighbourhoods, with parks, play areas and shops.



### SANDS END COMMUNITY CENTRE

Client: London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham  
 Location: Fulham  
 Date: 2017-ongoing  
 Value: £3m  
 Description: Creative arts and community centre with cafe and nursery.



### HAMMOND COURT

Client: East Thames Group  
 Location: Waltham Forest  
 Date: 2007-2013  
 Value: £5.3m  
 Description: Mixed tenure residential scheme of 43 homes, replacing the unpopular existing 1970s buildings.



### AGAR GROVE

Client: London Borough of Camden  
 Location: Camden  
 Date: 2012-ongoing  
 Value: £97m  
 Description: 493 new homes for existing and new residents. The UK's largest Passivhaus scheme.

## Selected projects



### JOHN MORDEN CENTRE

Client: Morden College  
Location: Blackheath  
Date: 2014–ongoing  
Value: £3.5m  
Description: A day centre in an elderly care facility for the residents of Morden College including dining room, chapel, library and health centre.



### GRENADEIR HOUSE

Client: Pegasus Life  
Location: Westminster  
Date: 2013–ongoing  
Value: £30m  
Description: Landmark retirement homes including 36 apartments, cafe, wellness centre and spa on Horseferry Road.



### SUGAR HOUSE ISLAND

Client: Vastint  
Location: Stratford  
Date: 2015–ongoing  
Value: N/A  
Description: Two developments on the new 26-acre neighbourhood in Stratford, creating 314 homes as part of a larger 1200-home development.



### SOMERLEYTON ROAD

Client: Igloo Regeneration Ltd for London Borough of Lambeth  
Location: Brixton  
Date: 2015–ongoing  
Value: £14m  
Description: Extra-care housing scheme with 65 homes and shared facilities, allowing residents to enjoy independent living.



### ROYAL WHARF

Client: Oxley Holdings  
Location: Newham  
Date: 2014–ongoing  
Description: 14-storey landmark tower with 110 apartments and restaurants as part of new 40 acre development of the Royal Docks.



### NEW ISLINGTON

Client: Great Places Housing Group  
Location: Manchester  
Date: 2009–2012  
Value: £2.5m  
Description: 18 affordable homes as part of the Manchester Millennium Community project.



### CROYDON INFILL

Client: Brick by Brick  
Location: Croydon  
Date: 2016–ongoing  
Value: £16m  
Description: Five schemes as part of Croydon's £250m programme to deliver 1000 new homes.



### KNIGHTS WALK

Client: Homes for Lambeth  
Location: Kennington  
Date: 2017–ongoing  
Value: N/A  
Description: 84 new high-quality homes as part of Lambeth's estate regeneration programme.

**We are Mæ • Architects • Urban Designers •  
Researchers • Policy Makers.**

Founded in 2001 and led by Alex Ely, who has advised government and its agencies on the built environment for over 20 years, we have established an international reputation for innovation and excellence in the built environment. Our ultimate goal is to build an enduring company for the benefit of clients, collaborators and communities that enriches both our culture and society.

**Our aims**

- 1** To make great architecture that adds economic and social value.
- 2** To create great places that are sustainable.
- 3** To build an enduring company made up of people motivated to make great work.

**Our expertise**

We undertake commissions across architecture, urban design and masterplanning covering all work stages. We are specialists in housing and mixed-use development, including social infrastructure — such as schools and healthcare — as well as commercial spaces. In addition, we carry out research and commissions to write built environment policy documents and guidance for the GLA, MHCLG, Local Authorities and developers.

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Our proposal for a new city in response to the growth potential of the Cambridge-Milton Keynes-Oxford Arc for the National infrastructure commission imagines a smart compact city for 250,000 people.





