

TOWARDS A MORE HUMAN LONDON 2026

A VISION FOR THE DRAFT LONDON PLAN,
INFORMED BY CITIZENS' EXPERIENCES OF
THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Humanise and UCL's Institute for Global Prosperity (IGP) convened the first of the IGP Studios to explore buildings and places affect people's emotions, sense of identity and belonging through a human-centred design approach. Hosted at Heatherwick Studio in October 2026, it brought together citizen scientists, researchers, designers, architects, developers and local authority representatives to examine these experiences through discussion.

London's growth must be judged by what it makes possible for people: belonging, dignity, wellbeing and a meaningful stake in the city's future. These outcomes should be an explicit ambition of the Draft London Plan, guiding how development contributes to everyday life alongside delivering homes, infrastructure and economic opportunity.

Welcome depends on people being able to participate. Attractive buildings and publicly accessible spaces can still feel unavailable through cost, unclear entrances or uncertainty about permitted uses. Successful places enable people across different ages, incomes and circumstances to meet, rest, play and spend time comfortably.

Neighbourhood change affects identity as well as physical surroundings. Familiar buildings, facilities and routines sustain relationships and cultural meaning. Residents can remain in their homes while losing connections with the place around them. Development should understand those attachments and explain how change will support continuity and create opportunities for existing communities.

Human experience varies and develops over time. Materials, lighting, movement and everyday amenities influence comfort, but their effects depend on context and individual circumstances. Assessment should consider construction, occupation and maintenance, recognising how places acquire meaning through use and adaptation.

Citizens' knowledge needs a clear route into decisions. Early involvement can reveal needs and consequences that other evidence overlooks. Its credibility depends on explaining how contributions influence proposals, how constraints are addressed and why some suggestions cannot be adopted. Learning from people's subsequent experience should inform future development.

The Plan's existing design, inclusion and public realm policies provide a foundation for this vision. The overarching ask is to connect them through a clearer expectation of human outcomes, supported by evidence and accountability. Development should demonstrate how it strengthens people's relationship with London and enables existing and future communities to see a place for themselves within it.



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01

VISION FOR A MORE HUMAN LONDON

London's growth must be judged by what it makes possible for the people who live here: a sense of belonging, a dignified everyday life and a meaningful stake in the city's future.

Every development changes more than the physical form of London. It changes what people encounter on their way to work, where they meet neighbours, what they recognise as home and whether they feel welcome in the places around them. These experiences are consequences of planning and design. They should be part of how the city defines successful growth.

The Humanise and Institute for Global Prosperity workshop brought these consequences into focus. Citizens' experiences, considered alongside design and development perspectives, revealed how buildings and public spaces communicate recognition, care and opportunity. They also showed how change can weaken attachment, make familiar places feel unavailable or leave people uncertain about their place in a neighbourhood's future.

An attractive development can inspire pride while remaining difficult to participate in. A new public space can offer visual appeal without the amenities that allow people to stay comfortably. Residents can remain in their homes

while the places and routines that connected them to their neighbourhood disappear. Conversely, thoughtful details, welcoming spaces and opportunities for everyday encounter can help people feel that the city acknowledges their lives.

A more human London would make these outcomes explicit. It would pursue development that strengthens connection, supports wellbeing and gives people across different ages, incomes and circumstances opportunities to enjoy and shape their surroundings. It would recognise that the experience of change begins during planning and construction, and continues as places are occupied, adapted and maintained.

This requires citizens' knowledge to influence the questions asked at the beginning of development. People understand places through repeated experience: the entrance that feels intimidating, the route that becomes uncomfortable after dark, the familiar building that carries shared history. Their knowledge can reveal qualities and consequences that other forms of assessment overlook.

The vision is a London whose growth deepens people's relationship with the city. The Draft London Plan offers an opportunity to give that ambition a clearer place in the decisions that will shape its future.

02

A CITY WHERE PEOPLE CAN SEE A PLACE FOR THEMSELVES

A more human London would enable people to recognise themselves within the city's future. Growth would create opportunities to feel at home, use shared spaces, maintain connections and take part in neighbourhood life. These outcomes would matter alongside the provision of homes, infrastructure and economic opportunity.

Belonging develops through everyday experience. It is shaped by whether someone can comfortably enter a building, afford to spend time in an area, find somewhere to meet others or recognise traces of the community around them. Design contributes through materials, entrances, scale and public space. Decisions about use, management and maintenance determine whether that invitation continues in practice.

Appearance alone cannot establish whether a place is welcoming. Publicly accessible streets and squares may still offer limited opportunities for someone who cannot afford their commercial activities or is uncertain about where they can remain. A more human city would make room for ordinary presence, including sitting, meeting, playing and spending time without a requirement to purchase something.

Dignity is equally important. The quality of an entrance, the care given to a communal area and the provision of

everyday amenities can communicate whether people's needs have been considered. These encounters recur throughout a person's life. Their cumulative effect deserves attention when assessing the quality of a development.

The vision also requires continuity through change. Buildings and neighbourhoods carry memories, relationships and cultural meaning. Adaptation can give familiar places new purposes while retaining connections with their past. Understanding those connections would help development respond to the lives already taking place around it, including during construction.

There can be no single aesthetic formula for achieving these outcomes. People differ in what reassures, delights or unsettles them. A more human London would treat that variety as knowledge to investigate, using citizens' experiences to understand how proposals might affect different people.

The ambition is for growth that strengthens people's ability to inhabit London with confidence and attachment. Development should contribute to a city where the benefits of change can be experienced in everyday life, and where existing communities can see a meaningful place for themselves in what comes next.

03

WHAT EVERYDAY EXPERIENCE REVEALS ABOUT DEVELOPMENT

Citizens' accounts reveal how the intended benefits of development can differ from the experience of living alongside it. New homes, improved public spaces and investment may create opportunities, while also changing the signals people receive about who a neighbourhood is for. Understanding those effects requires attention to how places are encountered, used and interpreted.

Exclusion can be felt before it becomes a physical barrier. Research around the Olympic Park described residents interpreting the appearance of new residential towers as evidence that the homes were intended for people unlike themselves. Development hoardings could convey similar messages through images of future communities. These responses did not necessarily arise from knowledge of tenure or eligibility. They show how the presentation of change can affect whether existing residents see themselves within it.

Remaining in a neighbourhood does not guarantee a continuing sense of belonging. The loss of familiar meeting places, affordable facilities or recognisable buildings can weaken connections even when people remain in their homes. This distinction between displacement and dislocation matters because an assessment focused on whether residents move may overlook

changes to their social and cultural lives. Equally, the arrival of new institutions can inspire younger residents and create a sense of possibility. The same transformation can carry different meanings across generations and circumstances.

Design intentions need to be understood through actual use. Accounts of the Olympic Park described an environment initially experienced as sterile becoming more appealing as planting matured and people established activities there. Smooth surfaces supported movement with pushchairs and created opportunities for skating. These examples suggest that the human qualities of a place develop through the interaction between its design and the lives taking place within it. Assessment at completion alone would capture only part of that process.

Small features can determine whether a place works for someone. Uneven paving can interrupt an otherwise pleasant route. Unclear entrances can make an accessible building feel private. Lighting can alter confidence after dark, while seating and toilets affect how comfortably people can remain in public space. Such details connect design with participation: their consequences depend on a person's age, mobility, responsibilities and reason for being there.

The experience of development extends across its delivery. Construction changes routes, views and the conditions of daily life, sometimes over many years. Hoardings and limited communication can create uncertainty about what is happening and how residents are involved. The future benefits of a scheme therefore need to be considered alongside the experience of reaching them.

These accounts also expose a challenge in how evidence influences decisions. Listening can reveal needs and consequences that a design team had not anticipated, but its value depends on how that knowledge is considered as proposals, budgets and priorities evolve. Citizens need to understand what their contributions have influenced and why some suggestions cannot be delivered. That connection is essential if lived experience is to become a meaningful part of planning rather than a record of concerns gathered along the way.

04

MAKING HUMAN OUTCOMES PART OF 'GOOD GROWTH'

The Draft London Plan already connects growth with quality of life. Its provisions on design, inclusion and public realm offer a foundation for a more human London. The opportunity is to give belonging, emotional wellbeing and citizens' experience a clearer, connected role in how those ambitions are interpreted and delivered.

Policy MBUL6 addresses local distinctiveness, identifiable entrances, robust materials and the effects of buildings on their surroundings. These provisions recognise that design quality extends beyond a building's appearance.

Building on that foundation, proposals should explain how their design is intended to support people's everyday experience. This would bring questions of welcome, dignity, sensory comfort and attachment into the assessment of quality. It would also require attention to differences between people, rather than assuming that a particular style or material produces a universal response.

The ambition should be to understand how design choices contribute to the life of a place, with citizens' knowledge helping to test those intentions.

Policy MBUL9 already addresses welcoming public realm, lighting, free seating, access to toilets and drinking water, community involvement, and

impacts during construction. It also supports temporary public realm and its provision in early development phases.

The overarching question is whether these provisions work together to create places where people feel able to spend time. Physical access is essential, but the experience of welcome also depends on clear information, comfortable surroundings and confidence that ordinary activities are permitted.

Public space should support meeting, resting, playing and being present across different ages and circumstances. Its success should be considered through those opportunities and how they are sustained through management and maintenance.

The Plan's attention to local distinctiveness provides a basis for understanding what people value about their surroundings. That understanding should encompass social and cultural relationships as well as physical characteristics.

A familiar building may matter because of the activities it accommodates, the memories it holds or the relationships formed around it. Neighbourhood change can affect those connections without displacing residents from their homes. Recognising this would help proposals

explain what they will preserve, adapt or make possible for existing communities.

This approach would support change informed by a deeper understanding of place. It would allow character to evolve while giving greater consideration to continuity, recognition and belonging.

Inclusive design provisions already ask for relevant engagement to be explained within design and access statements. The opportunity is to strengthen the connection between that evidence, the decisions it informs and the experience of the completed place.

Citizens' knowledge should help frame questions early enough to influence a proposal. As designs develop, applicants should explain how contributions have been considered and how changing constraints affect the outcome. Learning from occupation and use should then inform future decisions.

Taken together, these principles would make human outcomes a more explicit thread through Good Growth. They would connect the Plan's ambitions with a practical test: whether development strengthens people's ability to feel at home, participate and flourish in London.

05

THE OVERARCHING ASK: MAKE THE HUMAN PURPOSE OF GROWTH EXPLICIT

The Draft London Plan should establish a clear expectation that development contributes to people's sense of belonging, dignity, wellbeing and connection. These outcomes should guide how its design, inclusion and public realm ambitions are applied throughout a place's development and use.

This means asking a consistent question: how will this development improve the experience of living in London, for existing communities as well as those who arrive?

The answer should explain more than what will be provided. It should show how people will be able to use and enjoy the resulting places, how local knowledge has influenced the proposal, and how the relationships that give an area meaning have been considered. Where benefits differ between groups, or constraints require difficult choices, those differences should be made visible.

Citizens' experiences should help establish what successful change would look like. Their involvement should begin while there is scope to shape the direction of a proposal and continue through an understandable account of decisions. The expectation should be that their knowledge informs design judgement, with clear explanations of how it has been used.

The same human purpose should extend through construction, occupation and maintenance. A development's contribution to London is experienced over time, through changing routines, opportunities and relationships. Learning from that experience would help the city improve its understanding of what works and for whom.

This is an overarching ambition that can be carried through the Plan's existing policy framework. It gives the requirements for high-quality design, inclusive places and welcoming public space a shared purpose: growth that strengthens people's relationship with London and enables them to see a place for themselves in its future.

METHODOLOGY

This report has been prepared by Lorefully using qualitative material captured during the event. The primary source material comprises live delegate audio recordings. These recordings were transcribed and systematically reviewed to identify recurring themes, areas of agreement, points of challenge, and unresolved tensions. The analysis reflects only the content of spoken contributions made during the sessions.

The Use of AI in This Report

Artificial Intelligence was used as a supporting analytical tool in the preparation of this summary report. Its role was limited to processing, structuring, and synthesising discussion material and did not replace human judgement, interpretation, or editorial oversight at any stage.

AI was primarily used to assist with the following activities:

- Audio Enhancement: Removing background noise and boosting speaker voices to ensure clarity of transcription.
- Transcription support: Converting recorded discussions into text to enable systematic qualitative analysis.
- Thematic organisation: Supporting the identification and grouping of recurring topics, concepts, and areas of emphasis within and across the discussions
- Comparative synthesis: Assisting in the organisation of material across multiple use cases to enable side-by-side comparison using consistent analytical lenses.
- Drafting support: Helping to structure narrative summaries and tables in a clear and consistent format, based on direction provided by the project team.

DISCLAIMER

While this report has been prepared by the Lorefully team, no attempt has been made to validate, contradict, challenge, or independently interpret the views expressed by participants beyond what is evidenced in the captured materials. The analysis reflects synthesis and structuring of the discussion content as presented, rather than judgement on accuracy, feasibility, or merit.

Lorefully's role is to use its platform to capture, organise, and present insights generated by participants. The outputs of this report are intended to support further analysis and interpretation by subject matter experts, policymakers, and decision-makers, rather than to serve as definitive conclusions or recommendations.

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The Humanise campaign is sparking a global movement calling for more joyful, engaging and human buildings and cities. Inspired by Thomas Heatherwick's book *Humanise: a maker's guide to building our world*, the campaign shines a light on how dull, soulless buildings are bad for our brains, our economy, and the planet – and how what surrounds us can shape us, connect us, and bring us joy. Because human beings need human buildings.

Find out more and join the movement at humanise.org



The Institute for Global Prosperity is redesigning prosperity for the 21st century, changing the way we conceive and run our economies, and reworking our relationship with the planet. Our vision is to build a prosperous, sustainable global future, rooted in fairness and justice, and aligned with a realistic, long-term understanding of humanity's place in the world.

Find out more at ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/global-prosperity