



**SHAPING THE
POLYCENTRIC
CITY**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Insight Study examines the future of the capital's outer urban centres, exploring the next wave of development taking shape and looking ahead to how the capital could be strengthened as a truly polycentric city. The Study was conducted over a series of months, with in-depth research, interviews with key experts and industry-focused roundtables, alongside a major design workshop that explored future visions for the development of five public transport hubs in the TfL estate.

London's towns are the essential fabric of its everyday life: the multitude of 'stars' in the capital's constellation. They are focal points for local communities, but also part of an interwoven whole.

The capital is facing unprecedented change as its population is expected to grow to over 11 million by 2050, meaning we need a minimum of 50,000 new homes and an additional 46,000 jobs in London each year. We are already seeing a greater shift of people and businesses settling beyond the centre, especially because of affordability and land use.

Outer London's towns have a wealth of existing amenities and, most importantly, good transport connections. Both long-established town centres, such as Croydon, Kingston and Romford, and newer planned and emerging ones, such as Canada Water, Old Oak Common and Silvertown, can provide the key to unlocking capacity for the capital as a whole.

However, we can only make a sustainable city for the future if we accommodate and manage 'growth' in the right way, with mixed-use development and innovative regeneration around public transport hubs to the fore, as the proposals produced in a design charrette that formed part of this research have outlined.

New development should draw on the lessons of placemaking that have been so successful in regenerating London but also be adaptable and open to new uses and ways of living, working and moving around, especially with the transformation that massive advances in technology is bringing. London's towns have to be little pieces of city in their own right rather than dormitory suburbs, but also highly integrated with surrounding areas.

TO ENSURE 'GOOD GROWTH' IN LONDON'S TOWNS WE NEED:

Better physical and digital connectivity: London's towns have to be highly accessible and connected in multiple ways to all other parts of the city. We need more orbital links in public transport, so that people do not have to travel in and out of the centre, as well as a robust digital and energy infrastructure. Nevertheless, good public transport access to the centre will still be vital as so much business happens there.

Robust shared visions and plans: A shared and clearly articulated vision, clear decision-making process and coordinated leadership for the town are vital to ensure long-lasting change is successful. This means that policymakers, the industry and the community should work together through considered engagement, communication and collaborative working from the earliest stages.

Better use of local character as the foundation for new development: As each place is different, change in London's towns needs to be based on a profound understanding of local character and identity, what the priorities for the community are, and how the town functions socially, economically and culturally at everyday street level.

Innovative, high-quality mixed development: Towns also need to anticipate wider changes to ensure that they remain resilient. A mixture of types of employment, housing, retail and leisure spaces will help to support this. While local uses are important, it is also essential to consider how the town fits into the wider urban context.

Incremental, phased growth: Mixed-use development in urban areas is most successful where it is delivered in multiple phases, so that change is incremental and can be embedded gradually, and where opportunities for temporary and small-scale projects allow the testing out of ideas and concepts.

Denser development that respects local character: Building at higher densities can help make better and more efficient use of constrained and complex sites in town centres. However, this should also be sensitively integrated with the existing context.

