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WRK / LDN : SHAPING LONDON'S FUTURE WORKPLACES

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Shaping London's future workplaces

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Informed by roundtables and interviews with over 70 representatives from across business and the built environment, as well as policy and literature review, this NLA research examines how London can ensure its future resilience through its provision of space and land for business.

Though the impact of the EU referendum vote is as yet uncertain, in a post-Brexit world, it is clear that London will have to work very hard to attract and retain the best global talent. Availability, affordability, quality and location of workspace will be critical.

Yet space for commercial and industrial uses are under threat as the demand for housing pushes up land prices and planning policies favour conversion of offices to residential use. London needs a stronger city-wide strategy and leadership to protect affordable spaces for small businesses and industrial sites.

We need to design buildings and spaces that are more adaptable to the changing demands of contemporary business. This need to accommodate more uses in less space presents opportunities for innovative ways of thinking about how and where we work.

The research highlights eight recommendations for the London Mayor to ensure London's future resilience as he sets out the next version of the London Plan:

- 1) Create an adaptable, open and smart city**
- 2) Integrate workspaces with transport infrastructure**
- 3) Protect London's industrial land and uses**
- 4) Provide affordable space for new and expanding businesses**
- 5) Investigate new mixed-use typologies**
- 6) Pilot new design-led industrial developments**
- 7) Promote the wellbeing agenda as part of planning policy**
- 8) Plan for a multi-generational workforce**

1) Create an adaptable, open and smart city

Streets, cafés, and public spaces have all become places of work, as technology has disrupted the traditional structure of the office. Collaboration, flexibility, innovation and adaptability have all become fundamentally important in business creation and growth.

London needs adaptable buildings to ensure its future resilience. Just as co-working hubs provide flexibility for business, so the city at a wider scale should provide a robust, flexible framework to support future economic activity and growth.

- The Mayor should prioritise a strategic approach to a flexible, adaptable, networked, open city.
- Cross-borough working is needed to ensure that new commercial and industrial development is provided where it is most needed.
- Improving digital connectivity in the capital should be a priority.
- Research is needed to measure the value of 'third spaces', like libraries, cafés and clubs to the wider London economy.
- Buildings should be open and adaptable to accommodate changing requirements.

2) Integrate workspaces with transport infrastructure

Improvements in transport infrastructure are making locations beyond the centre more accessible, while many businesses are moving outside of their traditional office locations. Major new infrastructure, such as the opening of Crossrail in 2018, will have a profound impact on commuting patterns and where businesses locate.

As London looks to expand opportunities for living and working beyond the centre, uses around its transport hubs should be intensified, integrating commercial space with residential, along with high-quality public realm.

- A series of super-connected hubs along public transport links could help to reinvigorate declining town centres.
- Rethinking London's relationship to the wider South East could support local business growth, reducing commuting times and responding to the demand for flexible working.
- Identifying and classifying disused or underused assets around transport hubs in public ownership – both land and buildings – should be a priority for public bodies.

3) Protect London's industrial land and uses

Land and space for commercial and industrial uses are under threat due to massive demands for housing and higher land values. Uncontrolled office-to-residential developments have already resulted in the loss of thousands of square metres of office and industrial spaces across the capital.

About 50 per cent of industrial land in central London has disappeared since 2001, and vacancy rates for industrial spaces are nearing unsustainable levels of 5 per cent¹. Greater demand for online retailing means that people now expect products to be delivered in even shorter timescales, and so a good location with easy access to central London is more important than ever.

- Expanding exemptions to permitted development rights to protect London's designated industrial and commercial land and spaces should be a priority for the Mayor. London needs a stronger city-wide strategy and leadership to protect existing industrial sites in the right places.

- Local authorities should undertake a 'business needs assessment' as part of their Local Plan to identify the needs of industrial occupiers.
- Stronger documentation is needed at a local level to identify the diversity of industrial activity in London, and to highlight its value in terms of its affordability and contribution to local economies. This could support a wider educational campaign on the importance of the sector to the city.
- Use classes should be reviewed to accommodate modern industry, urban logistics, making and manufacture, and to reflect the reality of how these uses support local communities and economic ecosystems. More consideration should be given to the balance between what is defined as a primary and ancillary use of a site.

4) Provide affordable space for new and expanding businesses

London faces an acute and growing shortage of affordable workspace, which is essential in supporting SMEs and start-ups.

Some boroughs are already redefining public 'hub' assets such as libraries and community centres to incorporate affordable and shared workspace. Third sector and community-led organisations are providing alternative models for affordable workspace, alongside or integrated with affordable housing, in local neighbourhoods.

- The Mayor should work with boroughs and developers to make quantifiable provision for affordable workspace a key part of planning policy, including provision in new developments.
- Boroughs should incorporate shared and open workspace in Local Plans, so they can test and measure its value.
- More innovative combinations of varied spaces and leasing arrangements in individual developments should be encouraged to support a diverse ecology of businesses in local areas.

5) Investigate new mixed-use building typologies

New types of buildings that integrate living, working, making, logistics, manufacturing and/or leisure are already starting to appear in major cities worldwide.

As land costs remain high, the need to accommodate more uses in less space calls for greater density and intensification of development. Bolder steps are needed to ensure that workspace is integrated within new mixed-use building types, and not lost to higher-value uses.

- Local authorities should encourage early stage discussions between developers, space managers and occupiers to create more mixed-use schemes and encourage more innovative typologies of design and development that accommodate diverse uses.
- The Mayor should look to other major international cities for examples of how industrial and commercial uses can be integrated at neighbourhood level.

6) Pilot new design-led industrial developments

One of the reasons that older light industrial buildings are disappearing from cities is that they are seen as blots on the landscape and unsuitable neighbours to residential areas. Pilot projects with the involvement of major developers and policy makers could provide an inspiration and impetus to generating new light industrial structures.

- The Mayor should promote pilot schemes for modern design-led industrial developments, especially those for 'clean tech' including small-scale manufacturing and digital fabrication. This should also identify best practice for co-locating industrial and residential uses in areas not currently designated for industrial uses.
- Design-led solutions for industrial schemes could address the critical need to accommodate industrial and logistical uses closer to the potential customer at a time when land values are increasing. By allowing for multi-tenant occupancy, high-rise industrial schemes could become the norm by providing the developer/owner with sufficient return in the face of rising land values.

7) Promote the wellbeing agenda as part of planning policy

Workers are choosing to work in cities with high-quality amenities, cultural activities, leisure provision and a focus on health and wellbeing to support a more balanced lifestyle.

While much has been done to champion wellbeing within the office space itself, promoting a wider place-based approach to design and planning has a key role to play in the wellbeing agenda, by encouraging walking and cycling and providing spaces for respite. It also supports local economic growth by providing safer, more pleasant and more environmentally sustainable spaces in which to work.

- The Mayor and local authorities – which now have responsibility for public health – should support design and development that actively seeks to promote physical activity and mental wellbeing.

8) Plan for a multi-generational workforce

While there is much focus on attracting and retaining tech-savvy millennials, the shape of the global workforce is in fact much more diverse in terms of age, as we are living and working longer.

Research shows that older workers are often as keen to work flexibly as younger employees, while policy makers and companies have begun to recognise that the experience and skills of older generations are vital in boosting growth. '4G' workplaces, in which there are at least four generations of workers, will become more common as people delay retiring from work.

- London should pilot workspace concepts that specifically aim to bring together younger workers and entrepreneurs with senior professionals in an environment that can be adapted to different needs. This could help to generate innovative business ideas that can be put into practice using experience and leadership