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A renaissance of London's suburban housing is key to growth

In the wake of debate by policy makers about regeneration and new house building in London, one architect has focussed on how housing built as 'homes for heroes' in the last century can be re-engineered to meet the needs of existing communities and remain sustainable in an era of austerity.

London's population is expected to grow by a further 500,000 households by 2026 with much of it happening in the city's suburbs according to the now defunct London Development Agency and in a recent report by commissioned by London Councils* it is acknowledged that only about half the homes needed to meet the rising demand are being built. Whilst some will inevitably come from new build, Graham Modlen argues that inter war housing could be adapted thoughtfully to meet the needs of existing communities and help meet this growth.

An architect, whose usual work ranges from major infrastructure projects to private houses for high net worth individuals, Graham has turned his attention in a postgraduate study to semi-detached inter-war homes on London's arterial routes to offer solutions for communities locked into remaining in homes not always fit for their changing needs.

The study, *Labyrinthine Suburban*, proposes communal solutions to creating space. New green space with shared amenities such as courtyard gardens at the rear of blocks of houses where front gardens have been surfaced to create space to park cars or negotiating to infill back driveways with extra rooms to accommodate multi-generational families.

"Driving out of London on any arterial road, you can see the physical wear and tear of traffic noise and pollution together with sensing pressures created by increasing family numbers, lack of space, time and money which has forced people to turn their backs on noise and a decent view – cramming into the extremities of a two storey semi built for different times" said Graham.

"This is the kind of house I grew up in with back to back gardens. I imagine what the buildings might look like with some of the walls removed and then re-shape the boundaries and the interiors to meet changing needs in times when families may be unable to move and apply an architects' vision to an issue which has been tasking policy makers in local and central government " he added.

In a report published in March this year London Councils called for creativity and flexibility in meeting the capital's housing needs. Graham argues that it is vital for architects to support policy makers by helping to revision the existing stock in an economy where supply of new housing cannot keep pace with demand.

[Continued]

Notes to the editor:

*Homes for Heroes to today – a brief history of housing in London

<http://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/policylobbying/housing/supply/homesforheroes.htm>

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Graham Modlen is an architect with 30 years experience. He has worked with award winning architectural practice Zaha Hadid and was studio director at Austin-Smith Lord. He is currently working freelance on a number of projects.

Current projects:

- refurbishments to an arts gallery in the north-west
- commissions to re-figure interiors of private homes in London
- commission for a new house in London and the home counties

Past projects:

- One of a Zaha Hadid team to design a 800m long six lane motorway bridge that connects the mainland to the island of Abu Dhabi