

# Replanning London: 1945 to the present



By Alex Grant

# Let's introduce ourselves

- What interests us about the course?
- How well do we know London?
- What do we like most about the city?
- What do we dislike about it?
- What do we want to learn more about how London has changed in the last 75 years?

# About me

- I have more than 20 years' experience at the frontline of politics and planning
- Until May 2014 I was a Labour councillor in the Royal Borough of Greenwich for 16 years, representing Blackheath Westcombe – always one of London's most marginal wards. Chair of Greenwich's Planning Board (and Greenwich's design champion) 2006 to 2010
- I worked as senior researcher for Nick Raynsford MP, a former Minister for London, between 2008 and 2012.
- In 2012-13 I had a spell in the private sector at Indigo Public Affairs, doing community consultation on the residential conversion of Centre Point and large developments at Mount Pleasant, Canary Wharf and Shoreditch.
- Now a freelance writer, lecturer and consultant
- I blog about Politics, History and Architecture at [www.alexgrant.me](http://www.alexgrant.me) and tweet at **@AlexGrant24**

# **The plan for today**

10.30-13.30

London 1945-present

15-minute break at about 12

Case Study: Covent Garden

Contemporary London

## **Next Saturday, March 27th**

Three case studies: Woolwich, Victoria  
and Stratford

London's future Challenges, and  
Conclusions



Lots of time for discussion and questions, but feel free to interrupt me at any time with any urgent questions

# Setting the scene

I took this snapshot of the London skyline in 1991



.. And went back in 2014 to take  
exactly the same view



It's clear the most dramatic changes happened to the London skyline not in the 60s and 70s, but the 90s and noughties





In 1960 the London skyline looked like this – hardly any tall buildings. First wave of post-war rebuilding was mostly low-rise



London was still a low-rise city over which  
St Paul's reigned supreme



London's wartime experience tested the mettle of Londoners, displaced hundreds of thousands of people, and did irreparable damage to the City's fabric





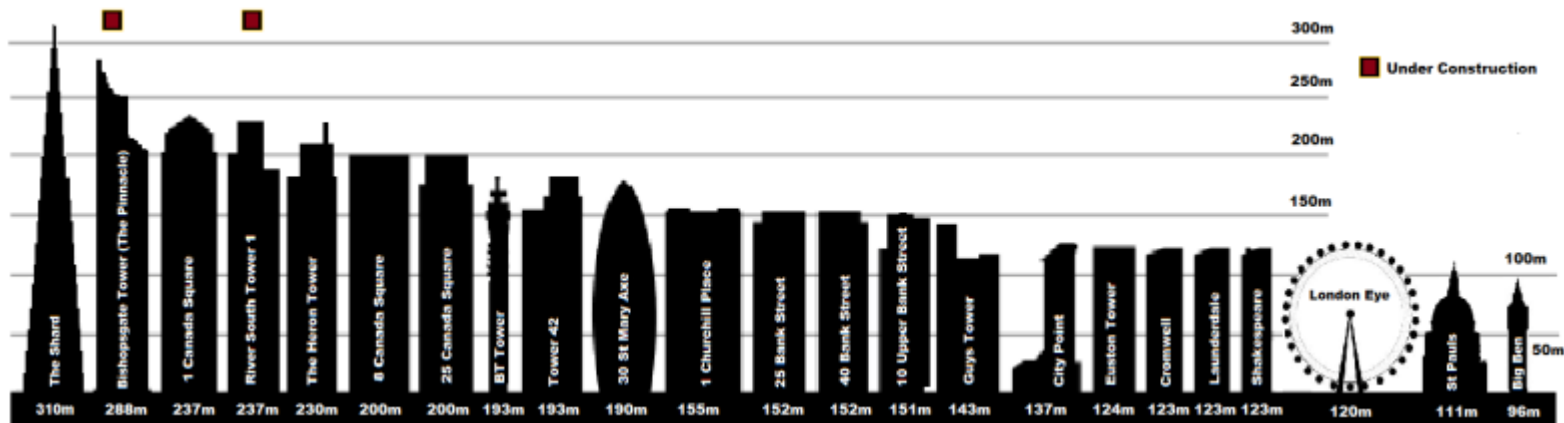
By the late 1970s, a cluster of towers  
was rising in the City of London



Which is getting higher, and denser,  
year by year



But the growth of tall buildings has been sporadic – Tower 42 was the tallest building from 1980 to 1991, when it was surpassed by One Canada Square, which was in turn only surpassed by the Shard in 2012



## Pub Quiz question #1

London has only become a high-rise city relatively recently. Until the Post office Tower was completed in 1964 the tallest building in London was...





# The 111-metre-high dome of St Paul's Cathedral, topped out in 1708



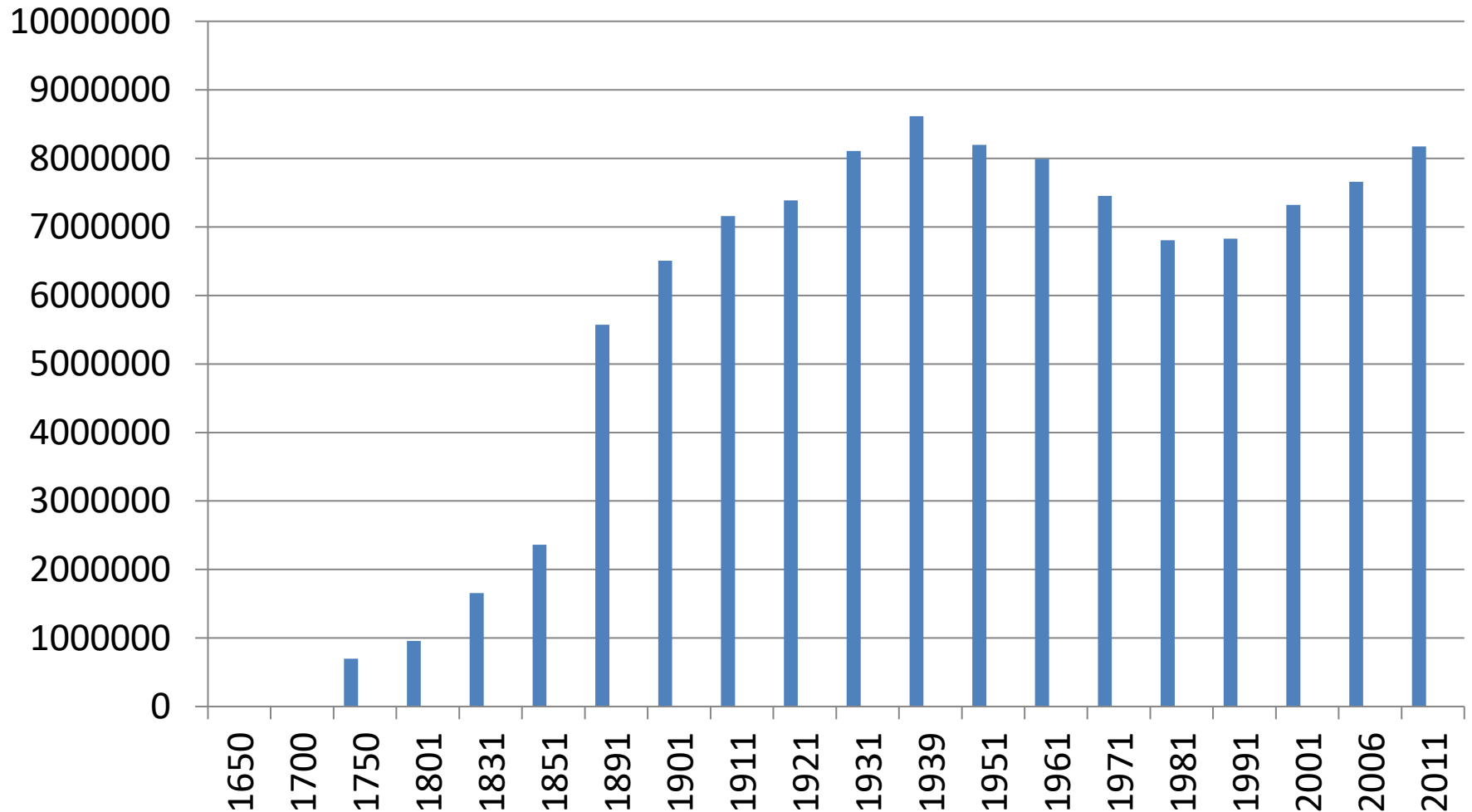
## Pub Quiz question #2

When did London's population first reach 8.6 million?

Answer: London's population reached 8.6 million in 1939 but then declined, only returning to the same level in the spring of 2015.

Its population reached an estimated 9.2 million in 2021 and is forecast to reach 11 million by 2041, but who knows?

The grandiose schemes of the 1960s and 70s failed to reverse the decline in London's economy and population. London's population had risen continuously until the Second World War but then fell by almost two million and has only recently recovered



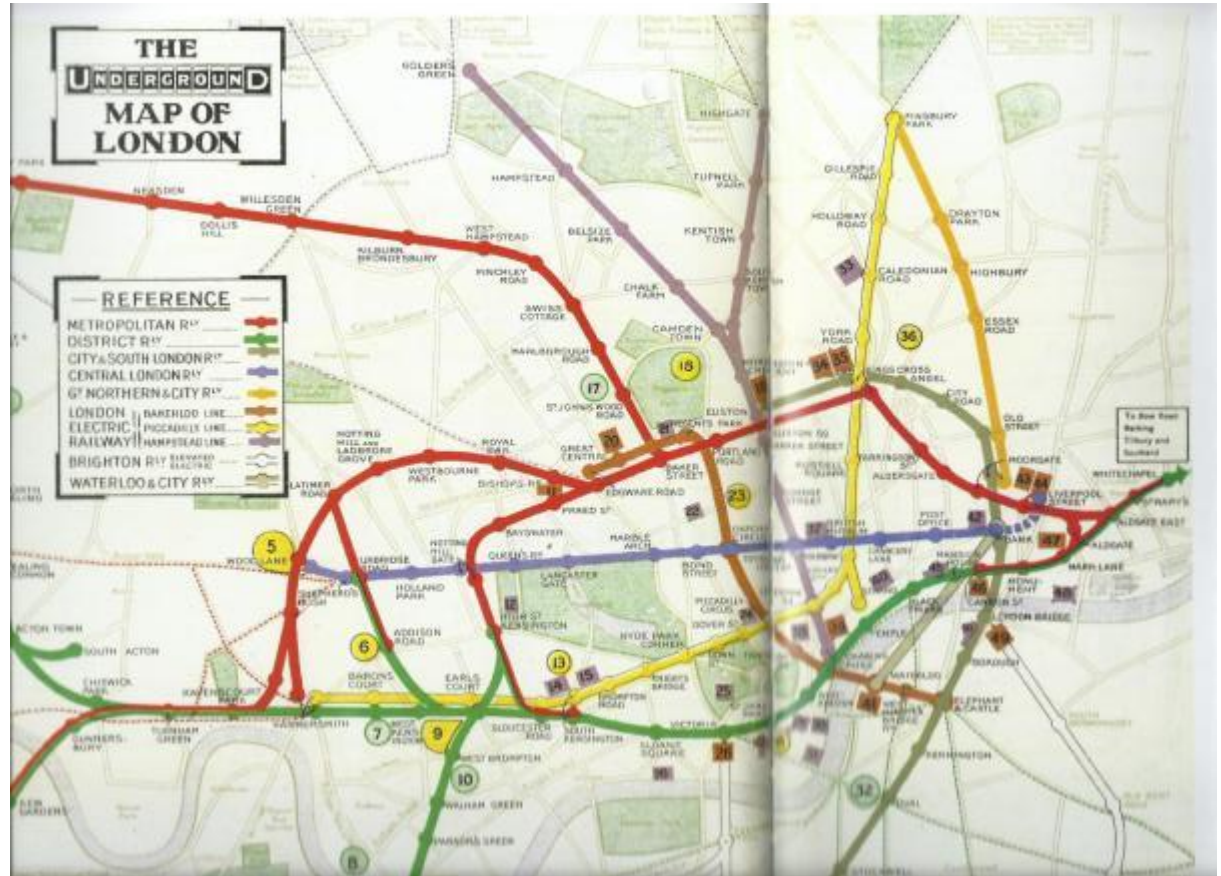


# The paradox of post-war London

- Just as London was being rebuilt as a “modern” city, it entered a period of steep decline in population, employment and prosperity
- Many of London’s post-war planners actively encouraged the movement of homes and jobs out of the capital, but under-estimated the scale of London’s decline
- London’s emergence as a World City has only happened very recently – and London has not been well-prepared for it in terms of infrastructure, governance or planning policy

# Rebuilding London after the war

London's biggest period of growth happened before World War Two, with a huge spread of suburbs along new tube lines from the 1900s onwards



# Suburbs grew rapidly in the 1920s and 1930s

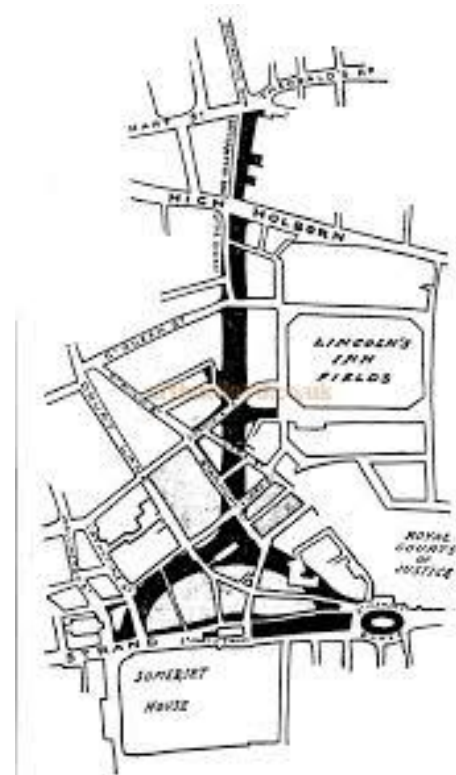




Contrary to  
common belief,  
much of Georgian  
and Victorian  
London – such as  
Nash's Regent  
Street - had already  
been redeveloped  
in the early  
twentieth century



The construction of two new thoroughfares - Aldwych and Kingsway – from the 1900s onwards had brought with it the largest slum clearance since the arrival of London's first railways 60 years earlier



London saw several modern, tall buildings built before the war (albeit not quite as high as St Pauls) such as Charles Holden's Senate House of 1937 (64m high) and 55 Broadway (53m)



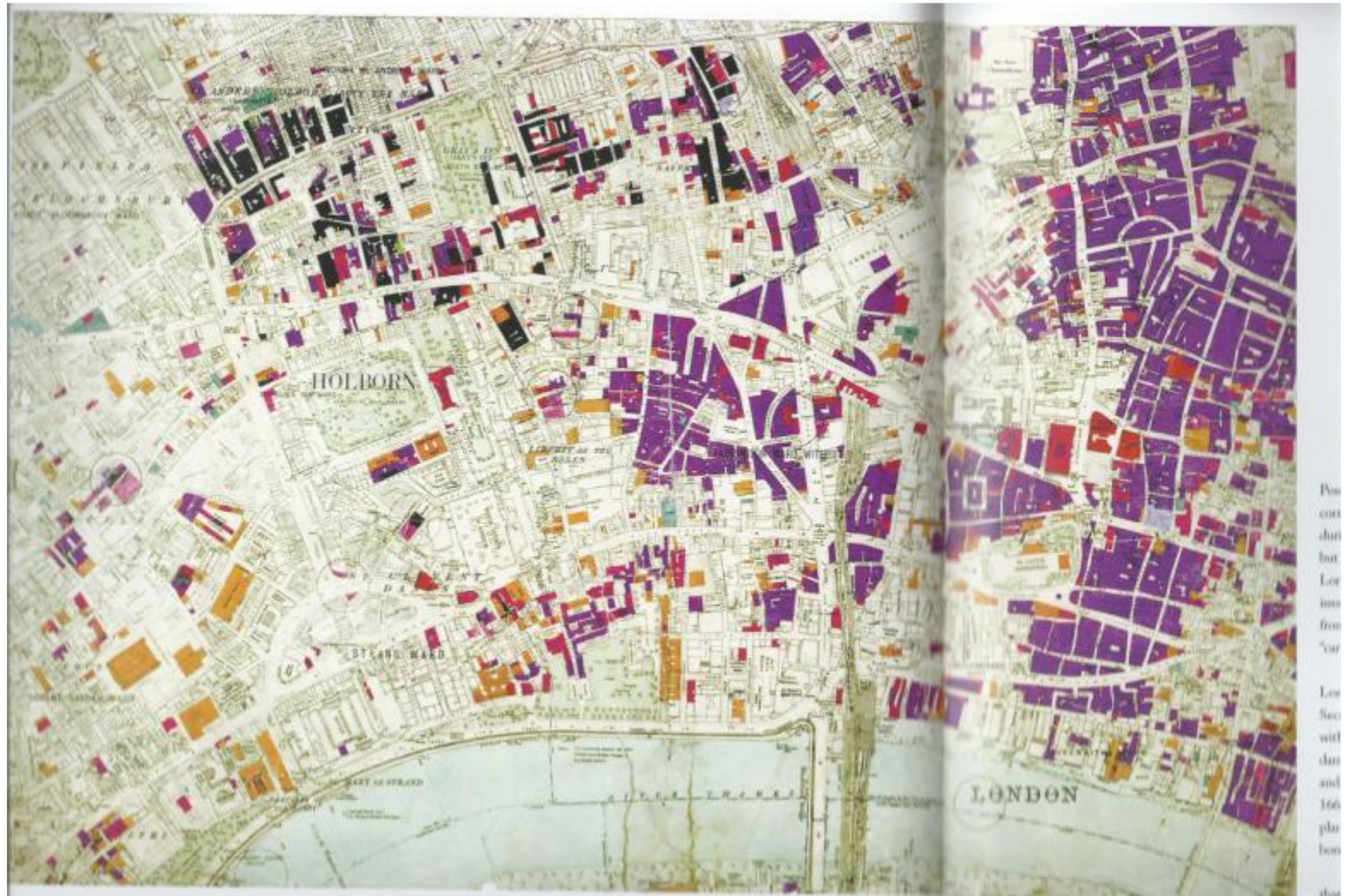


New Town Halls built in the late 1930s just before the war – such as Hornsey and Greenwich – were arguably more “modern” than the Royal Festival Hall built after it





Wartime bomb damage (shown as purple and black on this map) not as great as many people assume



Contrary to popular myth, the area around St Paul's was not completely flattened





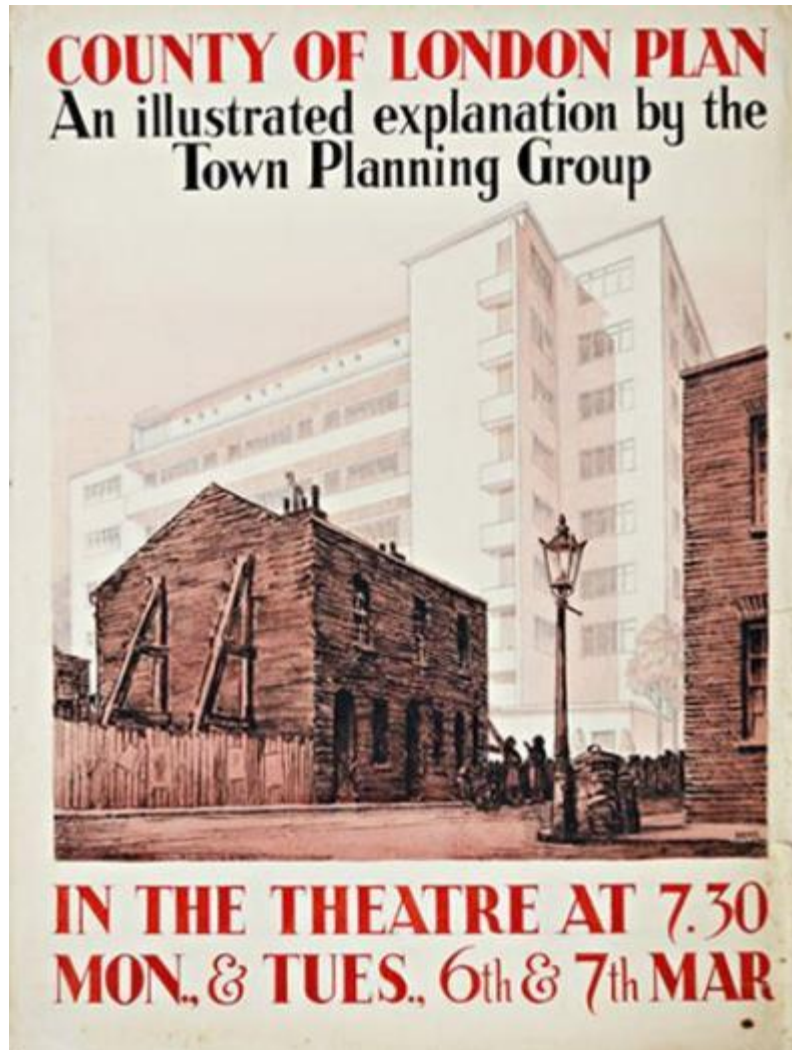
Post-war planning  
was as much about  
nostalgia for the past  
as Utopian visions of  
the future: Elliot  
Hodgkin's painting of  
St Paul's saw beauty  
amid the ruins



Outside central London, East End boroughs suffered much worse damage than the others



Patrick Abercrombie's Greater London Plan: devised in 1943 when the war was at its height. It assumed that much of Victorian housing stock was "obsolescent" even if reparable or not damaged by bombing at all



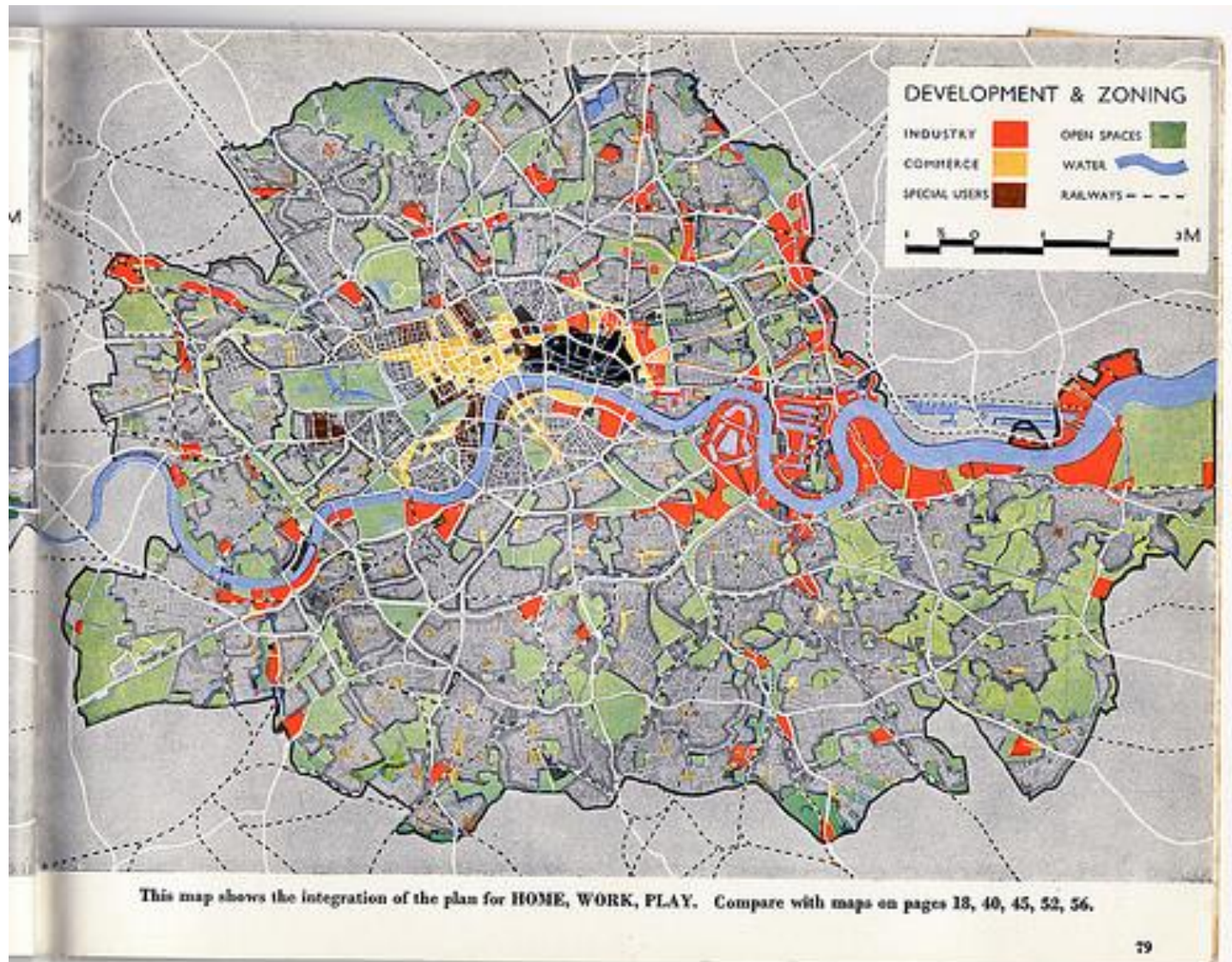


Abercrombie proposed a dense network of new urban motorways, both radial and orbital –mostly untunnelled. But most were never built

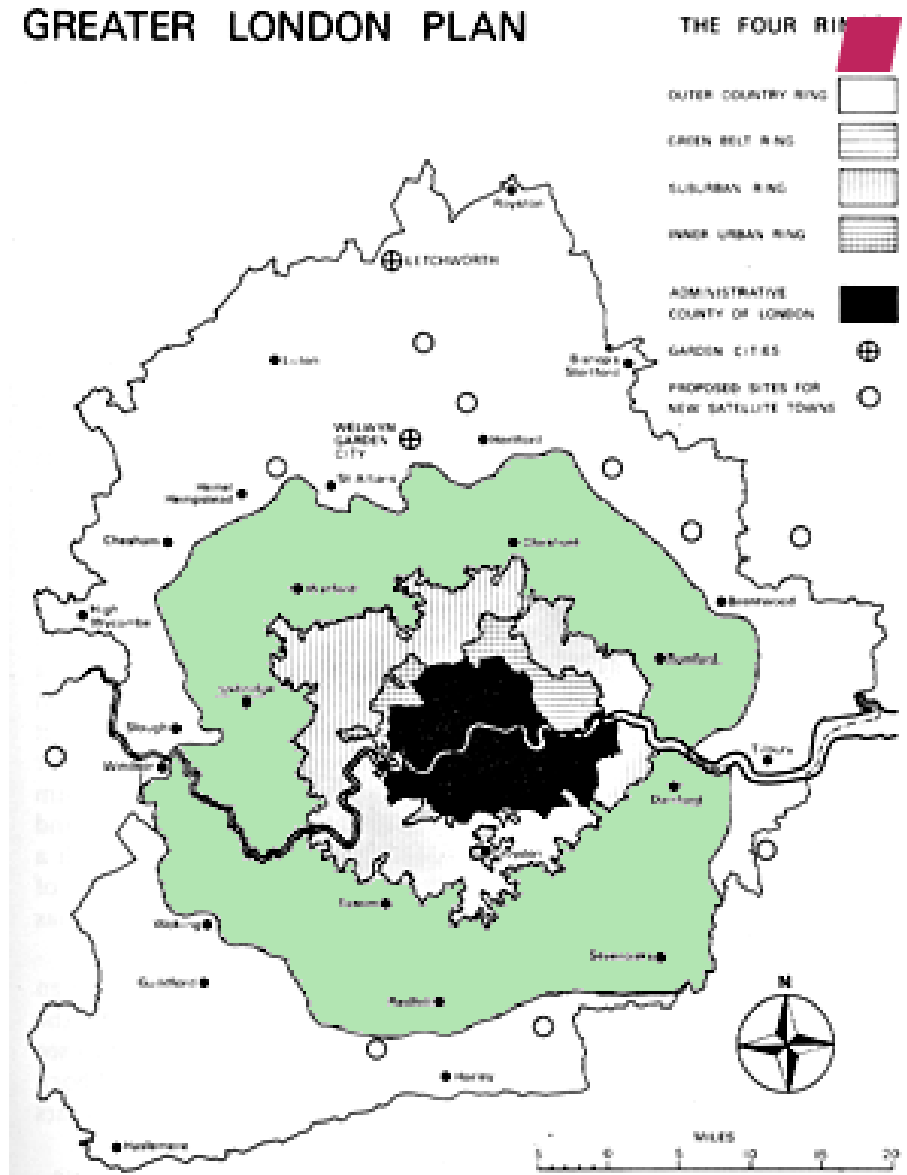




# The plan proposed a rigid segregation of land uses



And a thick  
“green belt”  
around London,  
with new Towns  
- often merely  
expansions of  
existing  
settlements -  
beyond it

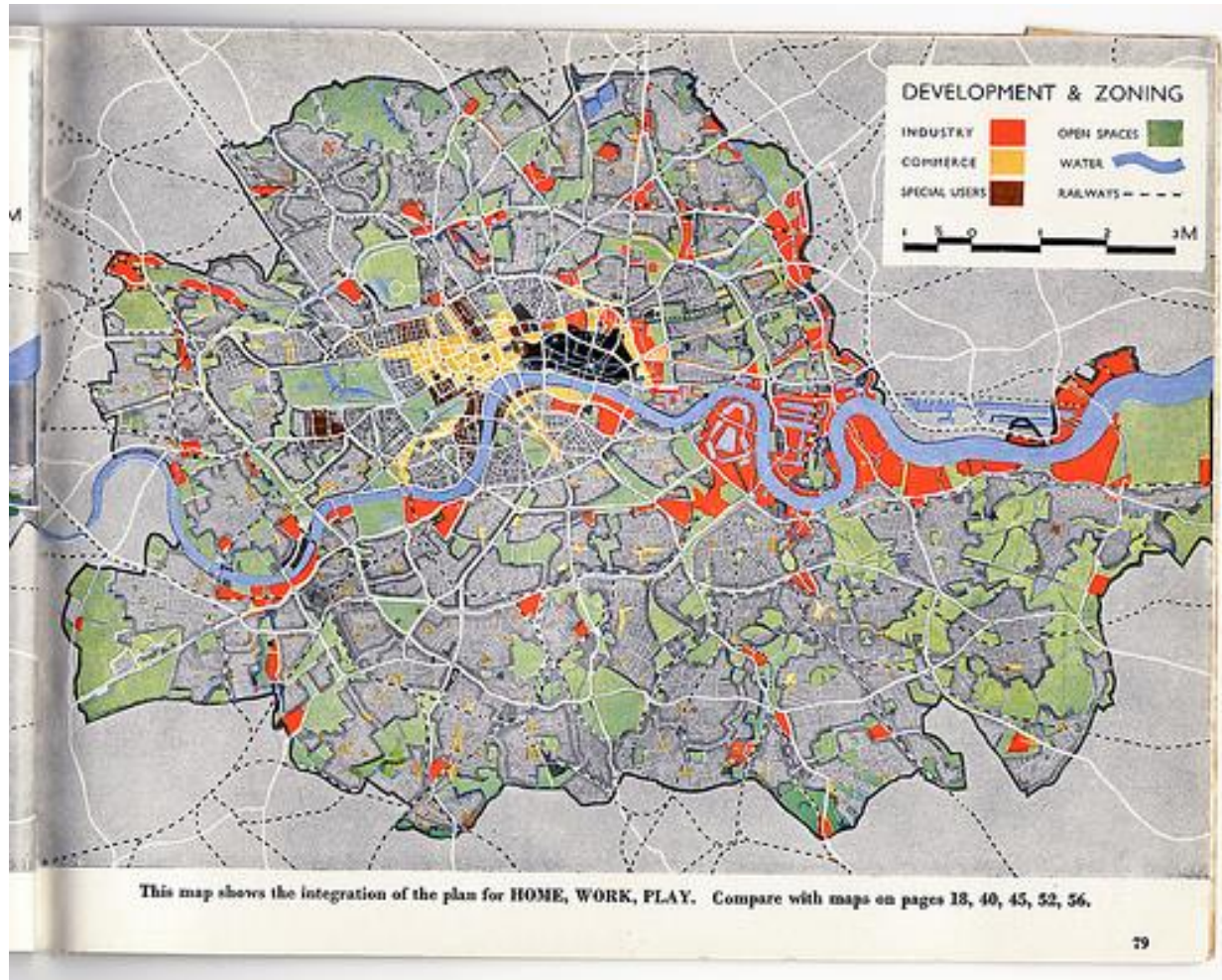




# Abercrombie's “Social and Functional Analysis” recognised that London was – and still is - a collection of villages

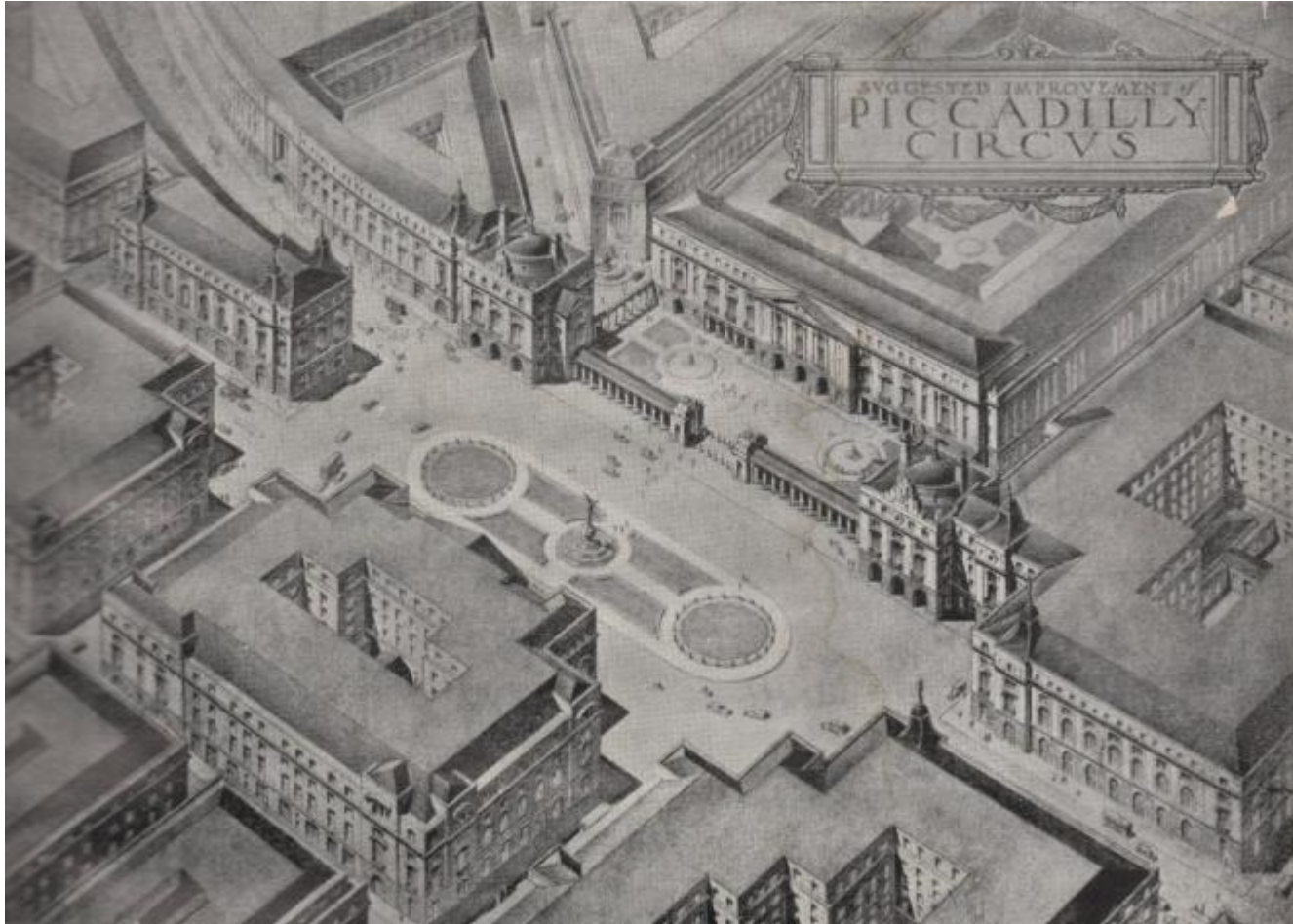


Abercrombie did not foresee the movement of manufacturing, and the Docks, out of London





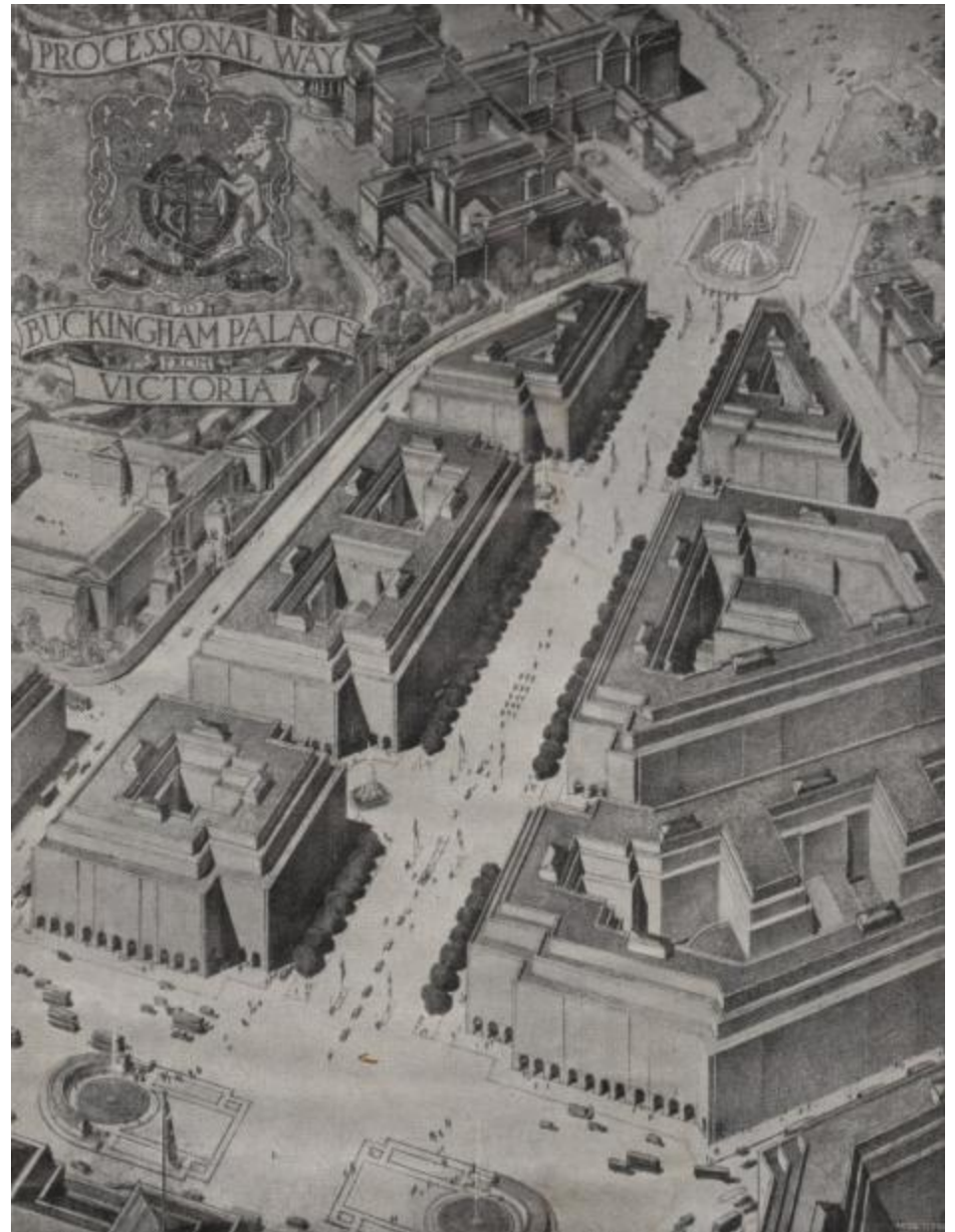
# Abercrombie's plans more modern – but less ambitious – than the Royal Academy's Plan of 1942



A new processional route from the River Thames northwards to the British Museum would have seen much of Bloomsbury and Holborn demolished



A new Boulevard  
would have linked  
Buckingham Palace to  
Victoria Station, and  
London Bridge station  
would have been put  
underground



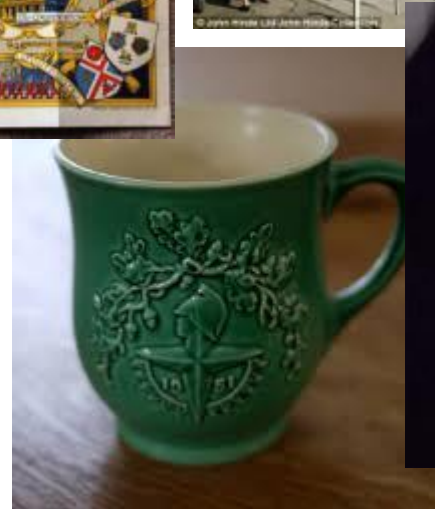


# The 1950s

# Festival of Britain, 1951: showcasing the modern



...but also celebrating the past. Hugh Casson was no modernist ideologue

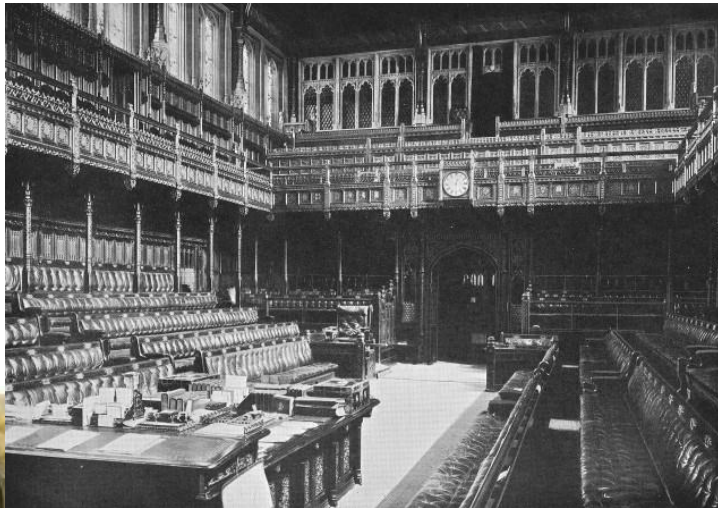




Many historic landmarks were painstakingly restored after almost total destruction, such as St Clement Danes



The House of Commons chamber, destroyed by an incendiary in 1941, was rebuilt as an almost exact replica





Much post war development was low-rise and in brick, not concrete: the Lansbury estate



Likewise with offices: for example, Victor Heal's Bank of England offices, built by St Paul's in 1953-60, in Portland Stone and red brick





A similar story with New Towns:  
England's first point blocks, built in  
Harlow in 1947, were in red brick



While Stevenage got a modern clock tower, most new towns were nostalgic in scale and materials



Action was taken to improve air quality following the Great Smog of December 1952: the Clean Air Act of 1956 solved the problem rapidly by outlawing the burning of non-smokeless fuels



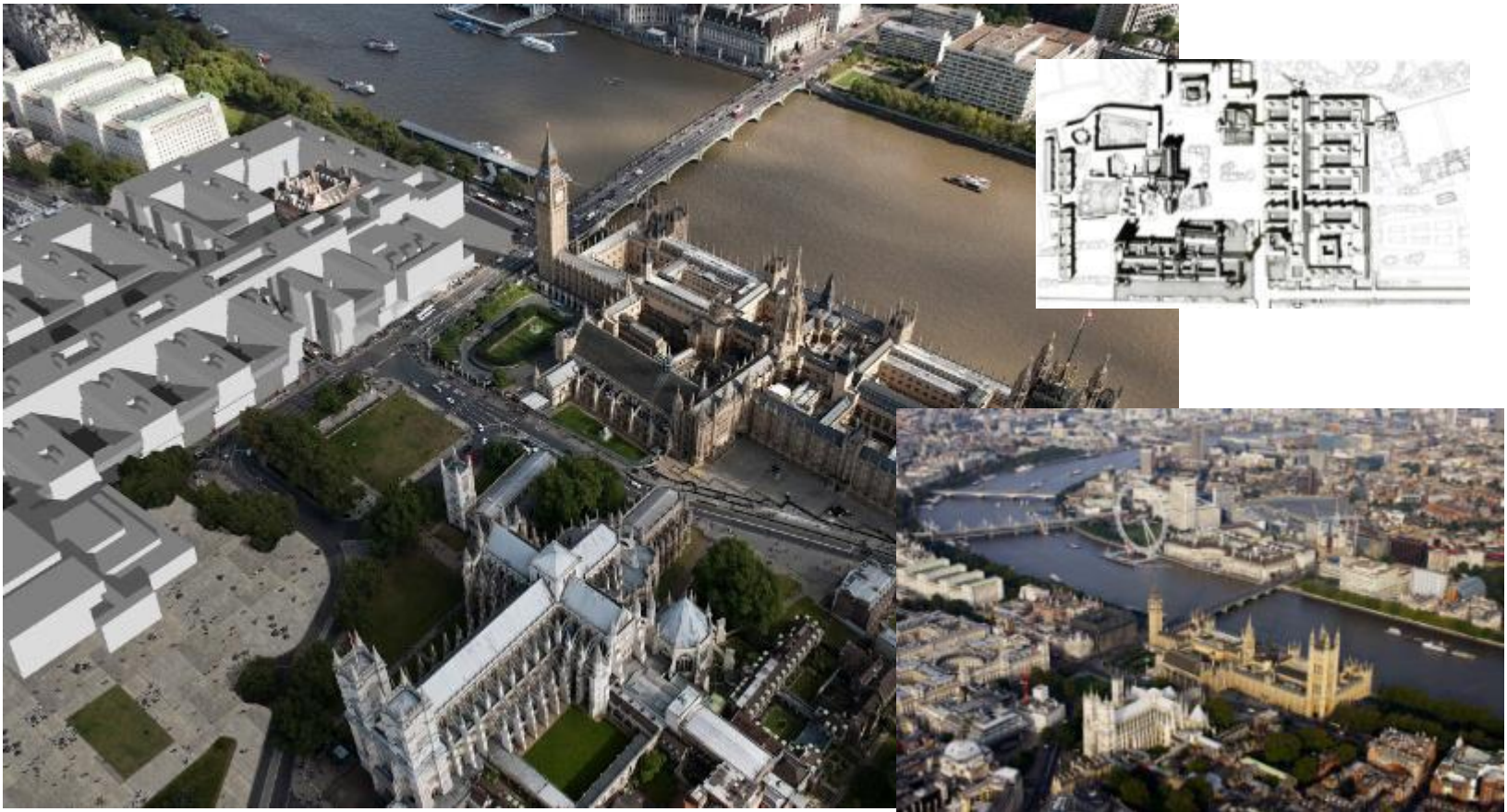


# The 1960s

There was much shocking demolition of fine buildings that had survived the Blitz – for road widening in the case of James Bunstone Bunning's Coal Exchange of 1849, or for no good reason at all in the case of Philip Charles Hardwick's Euston Station

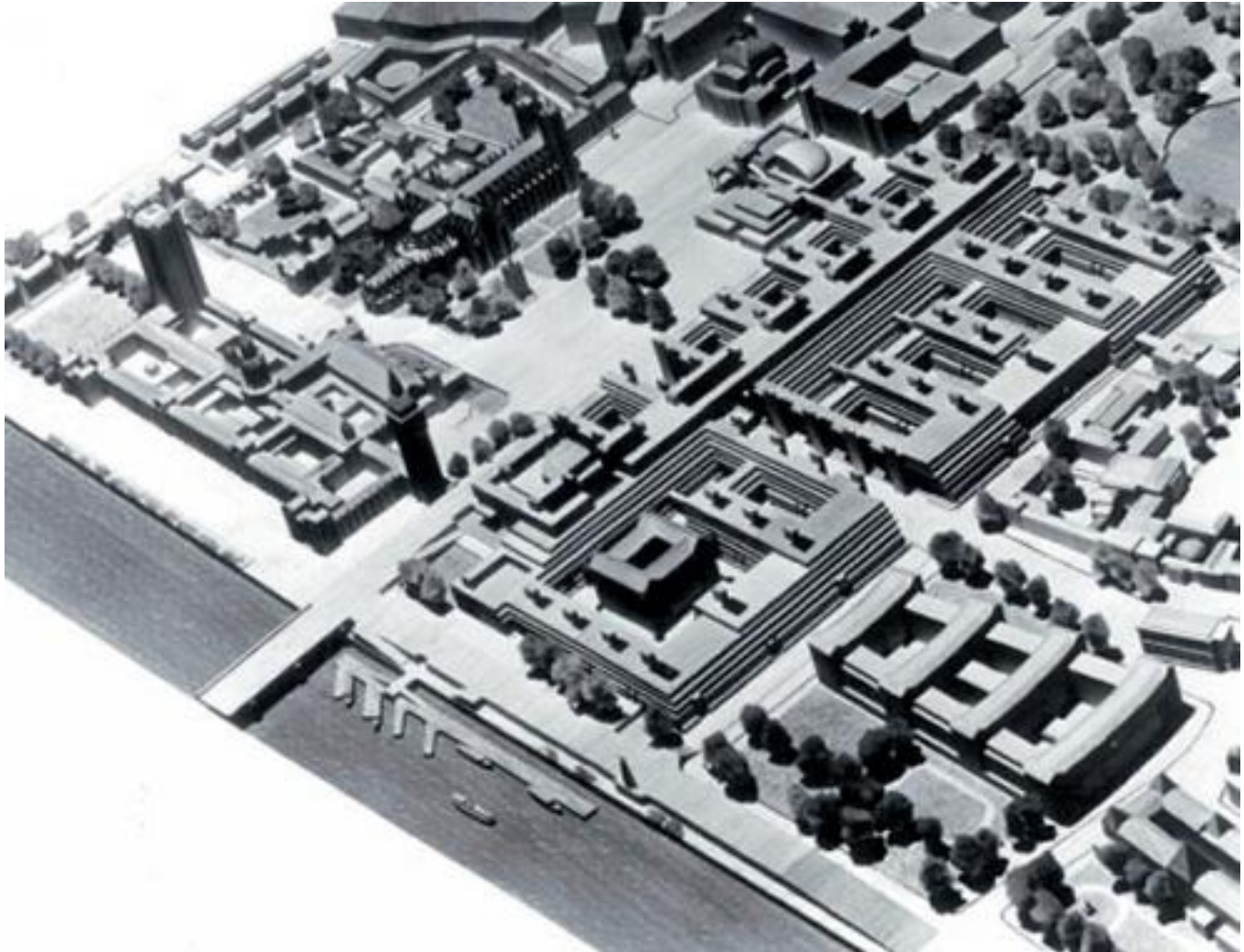


Royal Festival Hall architect's Sir Leslie Martin's early 1960s plan to redevelop most of Whitehall would have entailed the demolition of the Treasury, Middlesex Guildhall, and even Sir George Gilbert Scott's Foreign Office (though Norman Shaw's New Scotland Yard would have survived, crammed in a courtyard)





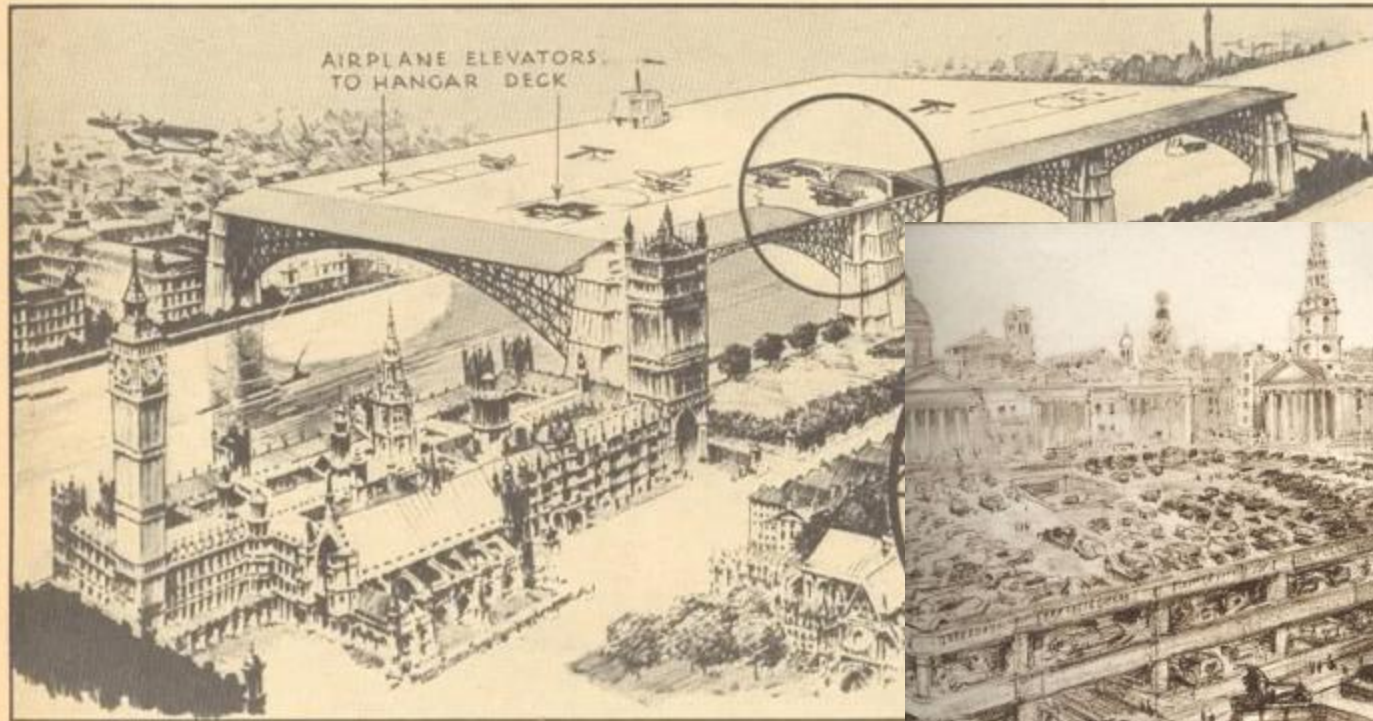
The scheme was abandoned in the late 1960s on cost grounds – not just conservation





But such outlandish plans were nothing new. Pre-war plans had existed for a new airport above the Thames and even a multi-storey car park in Trafalgar Square

## Plan City Airport Above River Thames



BUILDING a monster landing field over the River Thames is now being advocated before officials of the city of London, England, as a means of providing the city

with an airport close to its business center. The bridgelike structure, according to one plan put forward, would be high enough to clear the tallest masts of ships



A 1960s plan for a hanging Monorail was never built – but briefly revived in 2006





Plan for Soho, 1954 by Geoffrey Jellicoe, Ove Arup and Edward Mills – never close to being built, but taken seriously at the time





Victorian Gothic and neo-renaissance architecture fell spectacularly out of fashion. The 1960s saw the demolition of the Imperial Institute and Imperial Hotel (no relation)

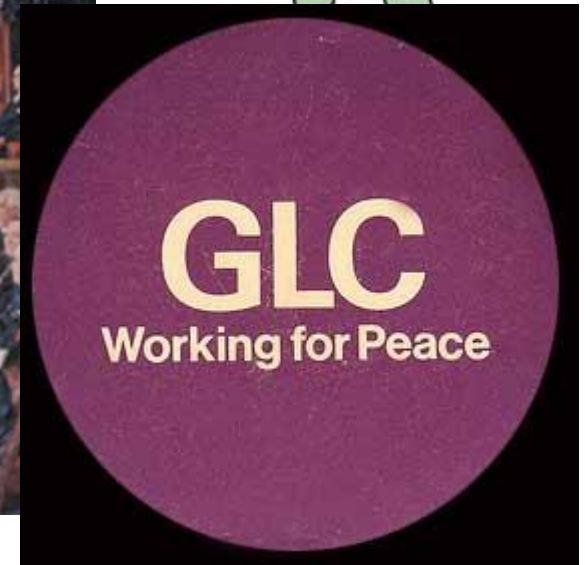


Although St Pancras was saved, many other landmarks weren't. Amazingly, in 1973 London Bridge was dismantled and sold for \$2.5m to Lake Havasu City in Arizona



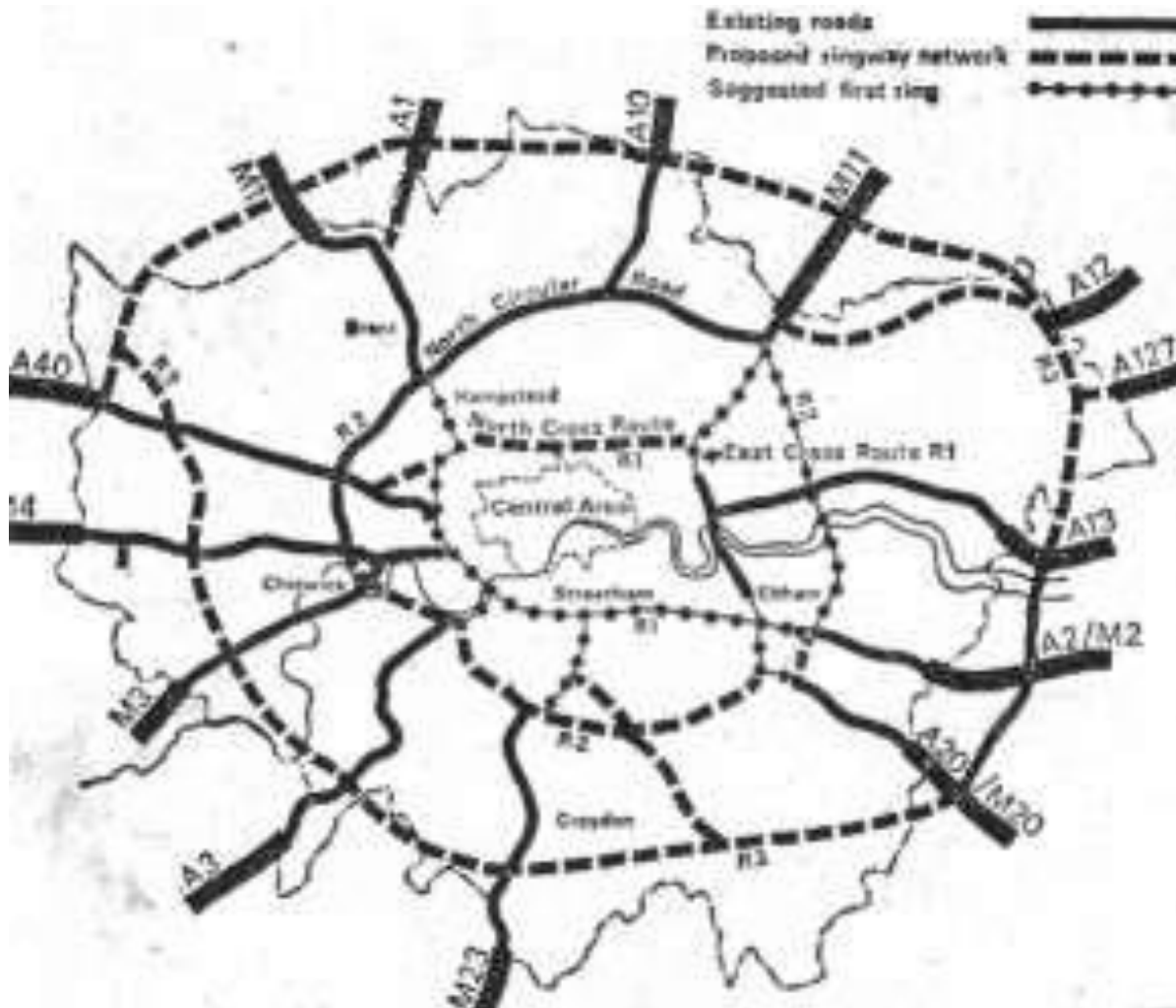


The creation of the GLC in 1964 saw the old London County Council extended to cover all of London's suburbs





The GLC Plan of 1969 proposed urban three “Ringways” or urban motorways, similar to Abercrombie’s plan. The outer ring was eventually completed as the M25 in the mid-1980s, but only a fraction of the two inner rings were built



In 1973, Labour – who had originally backed the Ringways - won back control of County Hall and the plans were ditched after heavy protests





Rem  
Koolhaas's  
1975 plan  
for a cross-  
London  
strip: A  
tongue-in-  
cheek  
architects'  
joke





Elephant and Castle was one place  
where the vision became reality – with  
disastrous results



Concrete, system-built blocks – such as on the Ferrier and Heygate estates - caught on in the late 1960s as a cost-saving measure



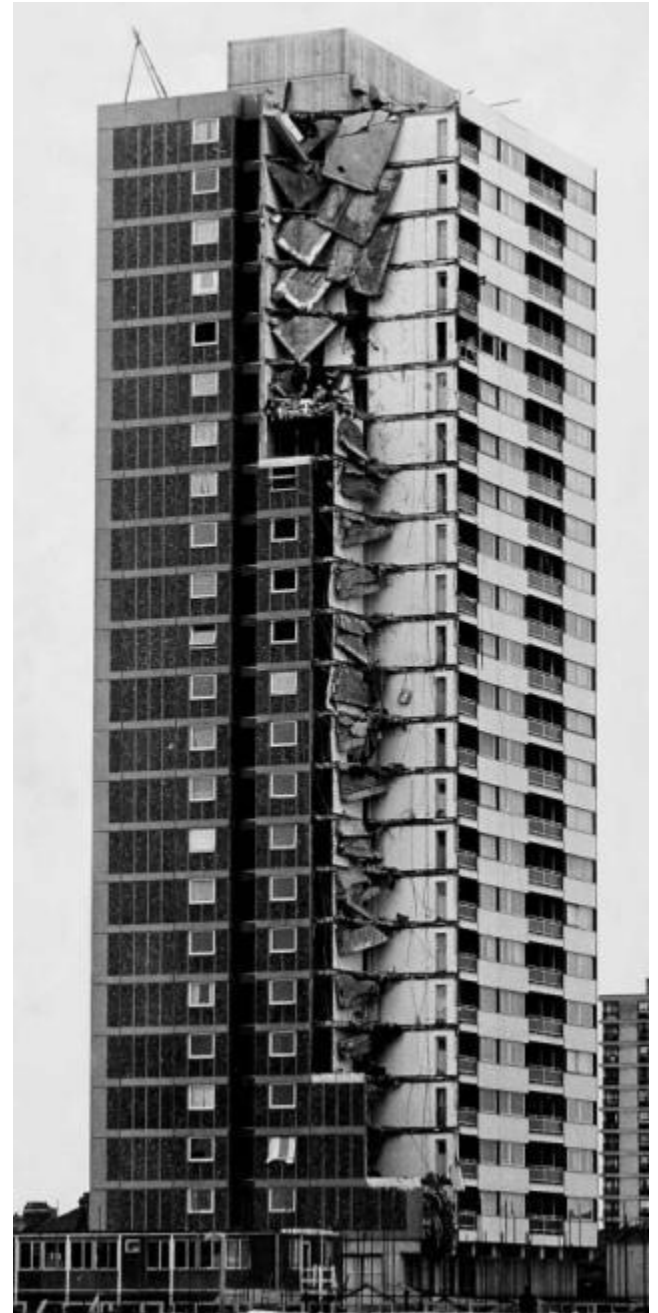


The Alton Estate in Roehampton (1958-59) is based on Le Corbusier's Unite d'Habitation. It had a relatively high budget, generous public space, and mature trees. But most other estates were failures

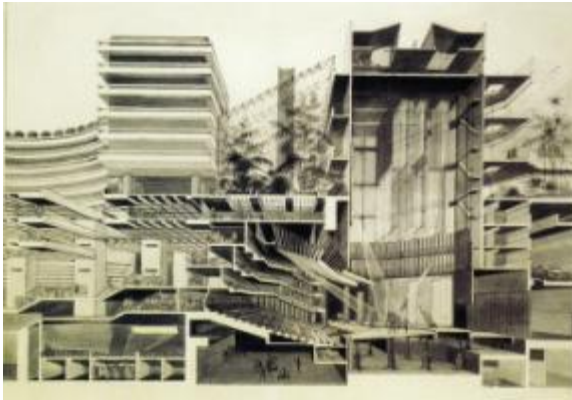




Construction of system-built tower blocks was halted suddenly after a gas explosion at the 22-storey, 'Large Panel System' Ronan Point in Newham kills four people in May 1968 – just two months after its completion



But some redevelopment schemes, such as the Barbican (1968-81), were successful when properly resourced and maintained, and when people were not forced to live in high-rise flats



# Comments and questions



# The 1970s

The 1970s: a return to high-density low-rise blocks, such as Odhams Walk in Covent Garden, but not often replicated



Local authorities and housing associations started to repair older buildings, not demolish them. Others were gentrified by a new urban middle-class





But valuable heritage continued to be lost – including the birthplace of General Gordon in Woolwich, demolished in the mid-1970s for new council housing



Office development was much better-behaved by the mid-1970s: for example, Elson Pack & Roberts' Ashdown House on Victoria Street, and nearby Basil Spence's Home Office



The 'Location of Offices Bureau' dispersed office workers away from the capital: from 1963 until 1979, developers wishing to build new offices in London required costly permits from the Bureau. Those office blocks that were built, such as Centre Point, were never filled and are often now converted to residential use





In 1960 the Greater London Plan proposed that over one million Londoners should be relocated from Inner London. The great majority of overspill families were relocated either to expanded towns or to new towns within south east England.

## Pub Quiz question #3

Which city overtook London to become Europe's largest city in the 1970s?

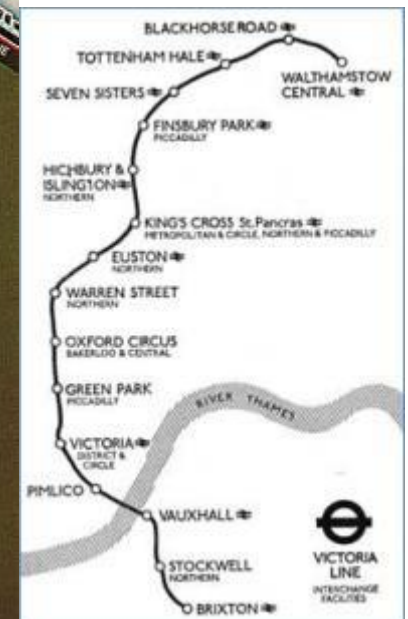
**Answer: Moscow**



# London seen as just another part of the South-East

- The Rise of ROSE (Rest of South East), and in particular New Towns like Basingstoke, Welwyn, Stevenage, Basildon and Harlow.
- ROSE could also stand for Rise of Suburban Exodus!

With London's population static or falling, there was no new transport infrastructure other than a scaled-down Victoria Line in the early 70s and a modest extension of the Jubilee Line in the late 70s



In the 1980s, Government spending cuts fuelled racial tensions. Crime, riots in 1981 and 1985, and unemployment blighted districts like Tottenham and Brixton



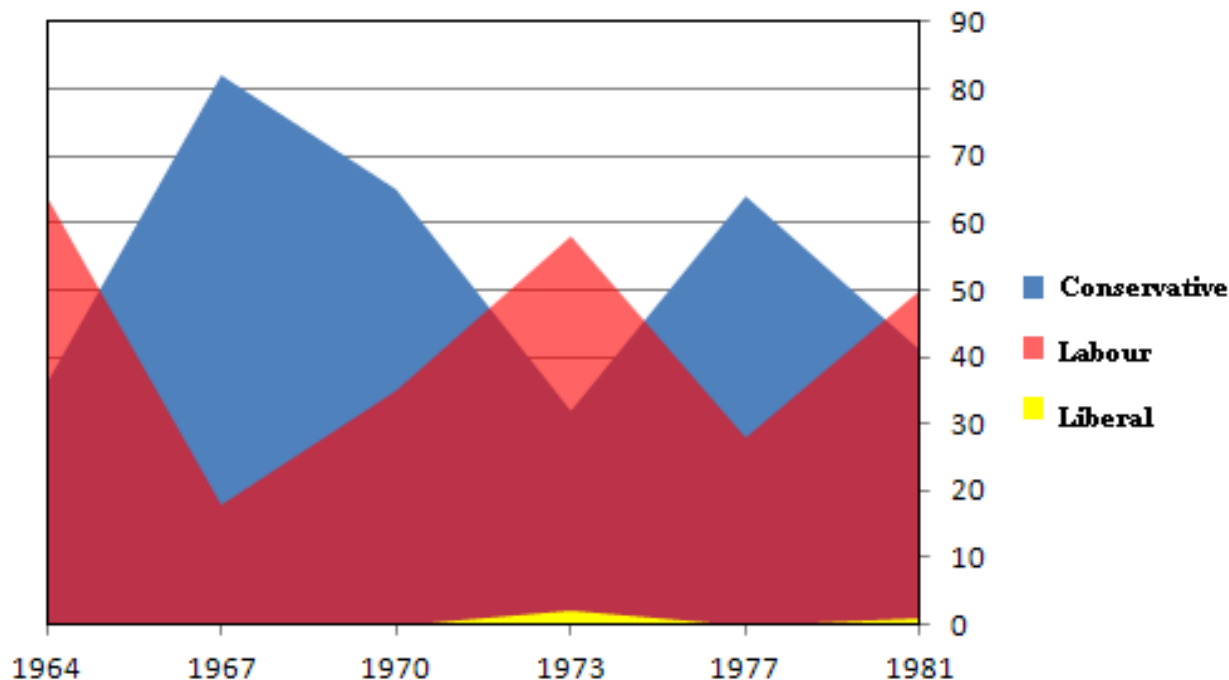


By the early 1980s the GLC was run by the Labour left  
and the Thatcher Government was determined to  
abolish it



The GLC was hampered by frequent changes of political control, conflict with the 32 boroughs and inadequate powers

GLC Control of Authority Graph 1964 to 1981



GLC's physical achievements, such as Burgess Park, have not proved to be of huge benefit





The GLC's own new towns, such as Thamesmead, were not a success. It was forecast to have a population of 100,000 and a marina but today it only has a population of 50,000 and no rail link. It seems like an outdoor museum of 50 years of planning blunders



London's crumbling infrastructure, shrinking economy and population falls of the 1960s and 1970s were followed by the abolition of the GLC in the mid-1980s





Strategic Planning in London was to be split between the dead hand of Whitehall, the market, and 32 competing boroughs





The Government started a number of schemes, such as Estate Action, Single Regeneration Budgets and Development Corporations.

The emphasis was on breaking up monolithic council estates, relaxing planning controls and encouraging free enterprise. The architectural results were often mixed.



*Homes on the Downtown Estate, Rotherhithe, prior to and following refurbishment in the 1980's*



Development in Docklands was initially low-rise





But the arrival of Canary Wharf in 1991 put an end to that!





# A new City Airport improvement accessibility – but blighted local communities



Transport infrastructure was slow to come. The Docklands Light Railway proved to be totally inadequate and the Jubilee Line extension was not opened until 1999. Development was slowed by Canary Wharf's receivership in 1992





The M25 was finally completed in the late 1980s, relieving congestion in London. But the new motorway was almost immediately full to capacity. No orbital rail links were built





# The 1990s

There was relatively little new commercial development in London – apart from Broadgate - in the early 1990s. Much of it was low-rise “Groundscrapers”, not high-rise - Banks and other financial institutions needed bigger floor plates



There were some high-profile and controversial new developments – such as Embankment Place, the National Gallery extension and One Poultry – but not much else





# Paternoster Square: a cause celebre that lead to indifferent buildings arguably little better than William Holford's buildings of 1958



Many big new office developments were in out-of-centre locations like Docklands and Hammersmith





Most new retail development was in suburbs like Bromley, Wimbledon and Kingston

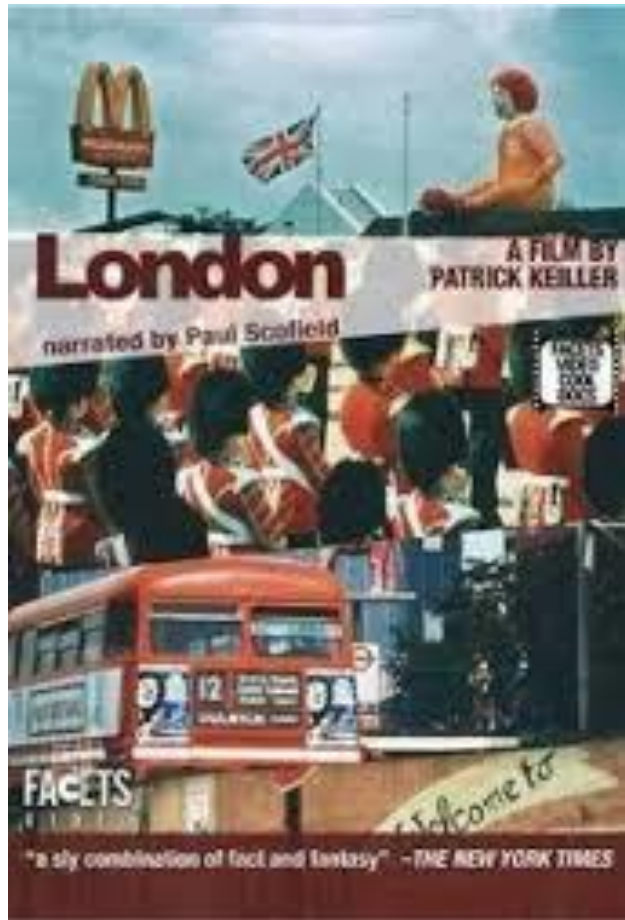




– or out of town retail parks like Bluewater which opened in 1999 with 13,000 free car parking spaces, just as planning policy made such places a thing of the past



London was often portrayed in culture as a city  
in long-term decline – for example Patrick  
Keillor's film London (1994)





Right up until the late 1990s, central London often felt tawdry and down-at-heel





# The Poll Tax riot of May 1990 turned Trafalgar Square into a battlefield



London was still subject to regular IRA bombing, with two large attacks on the City of London in 1992 and 1993



# London until the 1990s: managed decline?

- London's population fell from a peak of 8.5million in 1939 to 7.42 million in 1971, and just 6.8 million in 1981. Between 1981 and 1991 London's population only rose by 25,000.
- Predictions in the 1960s that this decline would be reversed proved false.
- London's workforce was also shrinking: in 1970 it stood at 4.1million, 7% lower than in 1966. The GLC had predicted London's decline but it proved to be faster than predicted: the number of jobs in London fell further to 3.75million in the early 1990s.
- London's manufacturing industry entered a decline in the 1960s, which only accelerated in the 1970s and 1980s. London's manufacturing workforce fell from 1.6m in 1961 to just 328,000 in 1993.



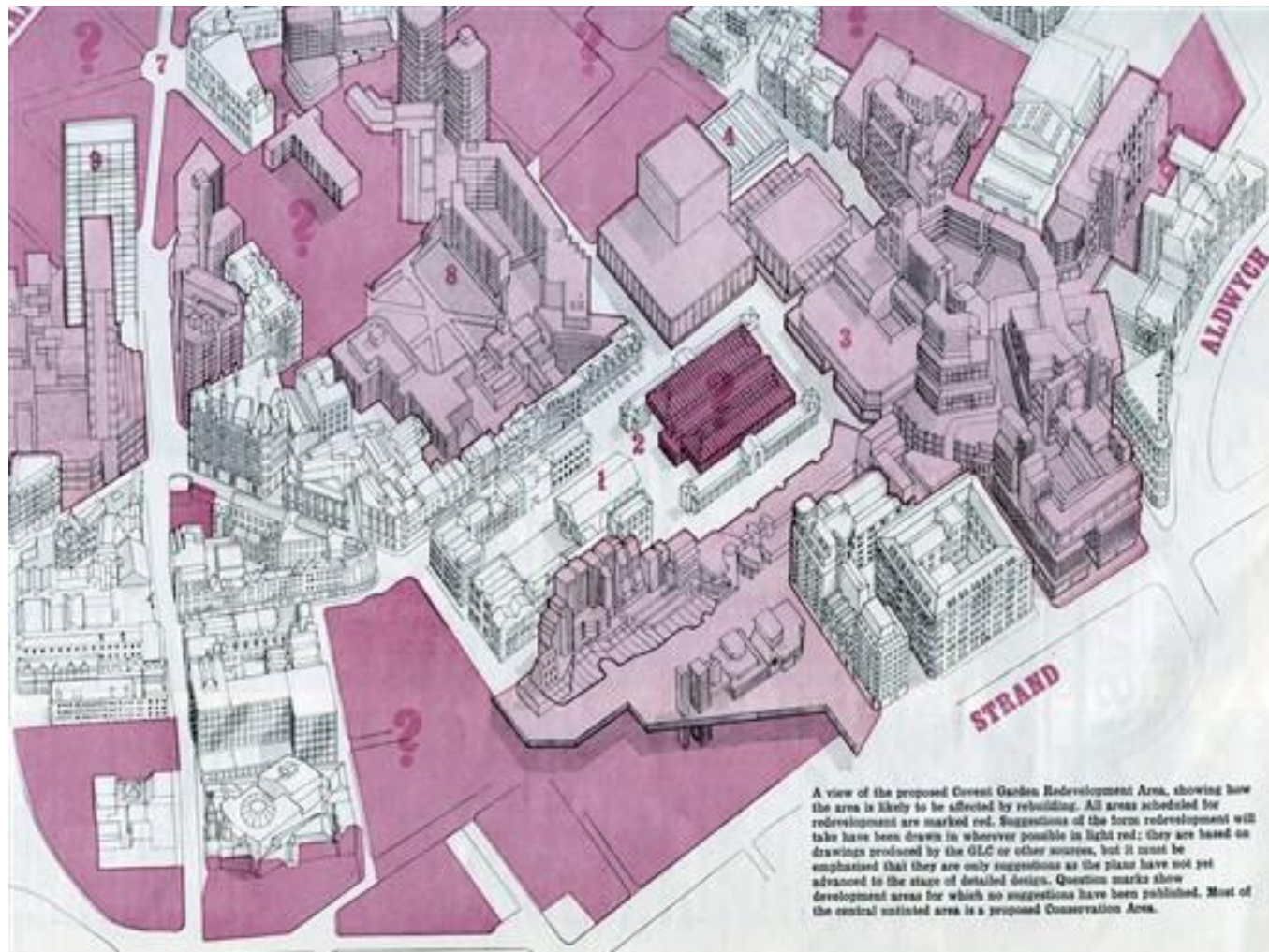
Comments and questions?

Let's take a 10-minute break

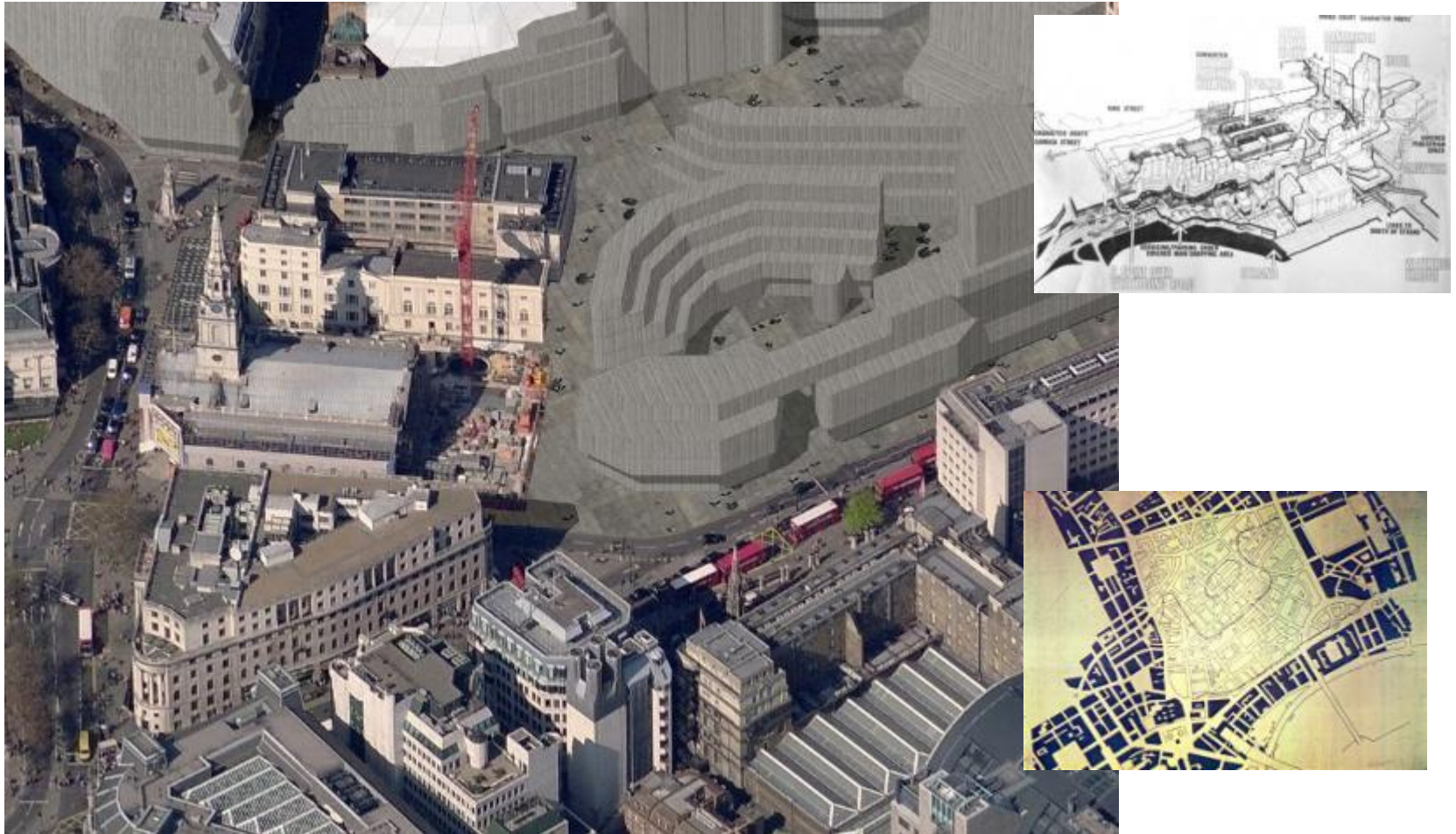
# Case Study: Covent Garden



# Covent Garden's redevelopment in the mid-1970s was only narrowly averted



The plan would have saved Charles Fowler's market buildings of 1828-30 - but knocked down pretty much everything else nearby





Before the Fruit and Veg market moved, Covent Garden was a messy, ungentrified place





By the 1960s the Fruit and Veg market at Covent garden was causing chronic traffic congestion and was inefficient and overcrowded



Ironically, the GLC's Plan of the late 60s was less ambitious than the Royal Academy's Plan of 1942, which would have seen both Fowler's market and the Royal Opera House demolished entirely





But it provoked a huge campaign of opposition from local residents, small businesses and conservationists





Although the Plan was officially approved by Government Minister Geoffrey Rippon, his listing of 245 buildings effectively killed it stone dead. Russell Street and Maiden Lane were saved



An office block on Long Acre, completed in 1981, is the only part of the original plan to have been executed





Paradoxically, some of Covent Garden's oldest buildings on Russell Street were demolished in the 1990s for the Royal Opera House extension





While new  
community  
buildings in  
Covent Garden  
are not always  
architecturally  
successful



Community action lead to the market being kept in use – though for fashion and tourist tat, not fruit and veg



Ironically, next to the market where apples were once sold wholesale, Apple now has one of its most lucrative retail stores





Comments and questions

# London in the New Millennium

One of New Labour's most long-lasting legacies is an elected Mayor for London, first elected in 2000



**MAYOR OF LONDON**



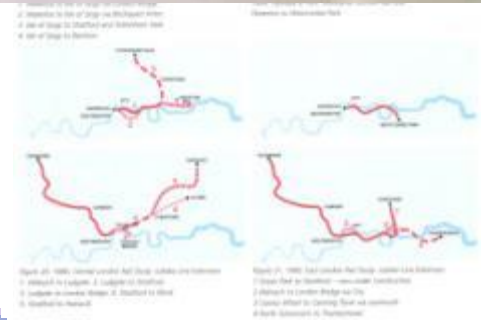
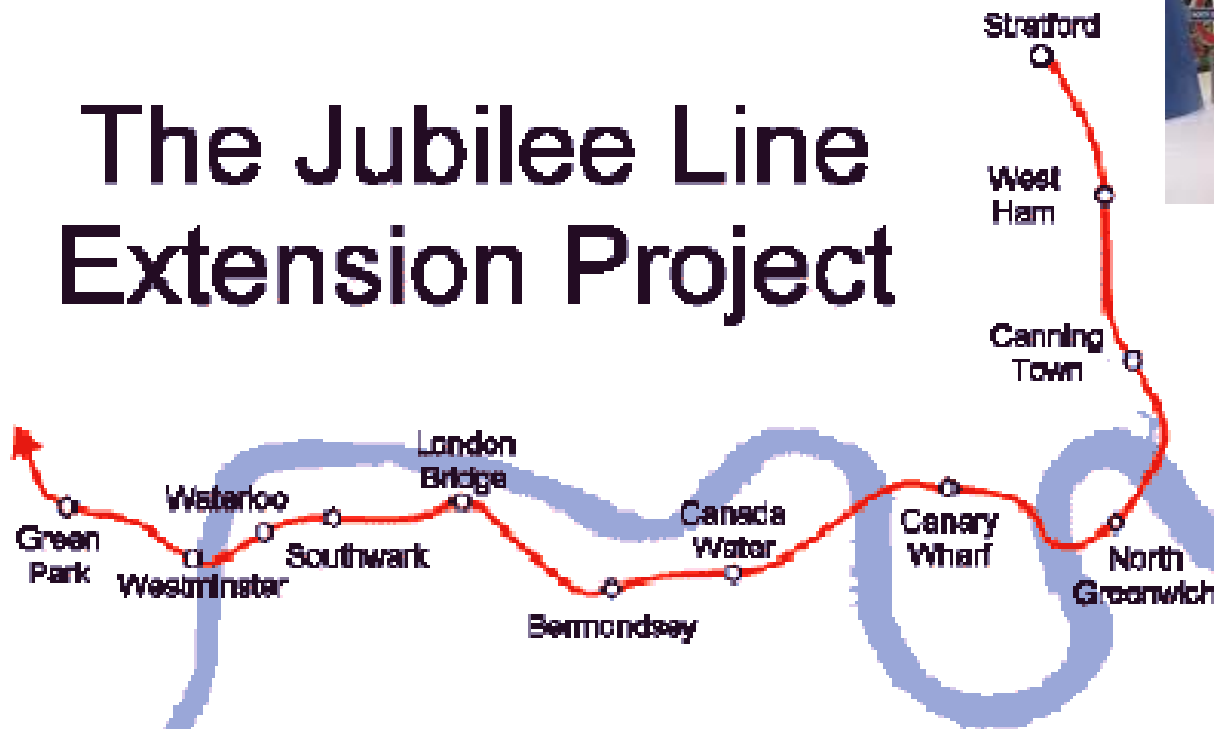


New infrastructure and grand Projects were delivered in the late 1990s – but often late and over budget and with added controversy: the British Museum Great Court (2000), Portcullis House (2001), the Royal Opera House refurbishment (1997-99), the London Eye and the Millennium Dome



The Jubilee Line extension of the late 1990s was impressive – but two years late, 50% over budget, with a signalling system that did not work, and leaving Thamesmead unconnected

# The Jubilee Line Extension Project





London re-emerged as a booming "Global City" from the late 1990s onwards. Mayor Ken Livingston's London Plan of 2004 was unashamedly pro-growth, pro-development and pro tall buildings

MAYOR OF LONDON

The London Plan





A stance continued by his successor, Boris Johnson, from 2008 to 2016, albeit with less emphasis on affordable housing



## THE LONDON PLAN

SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR GREATER LONDON  
JULY 2011



MAYOR OF LONDON

The current London Plan target is for 42,000 homes in the capital each year over the next twenty years. This is twice the rate of new homes built since the 1970s



# Mayor Sadiq Khan – elected May 2016

- First Muslim mayor of any major western city
- Ambitious – and still in his early fifties (born in October 1970). Like Boris, he may want to return to Westminster politics after one or two terms as Mayor.
- Risk-averse, but keen on political gestures (refusing to meet Donald Trump and calling for his state visit to be cancelled, the pro-EU ‘London is Open’ campaign).
- Put lots of emphasis on a fares freeze. But it’s being paid for by cuts to bus services and tube investment, and now ridership is falling there’s a TFL budget gap
- Pledged to build affordable housing at twice the rate of Boris: 20,000 units a year for four years, many at low rents. But he had originally pledged 80,000 a year. Latest target – 116,000 affordable homes by 2022 – will be missed by 50%.





With police budgets largely outside his control, Khan has managed expectations downwards – particularly with regards to rising levels of knife crime



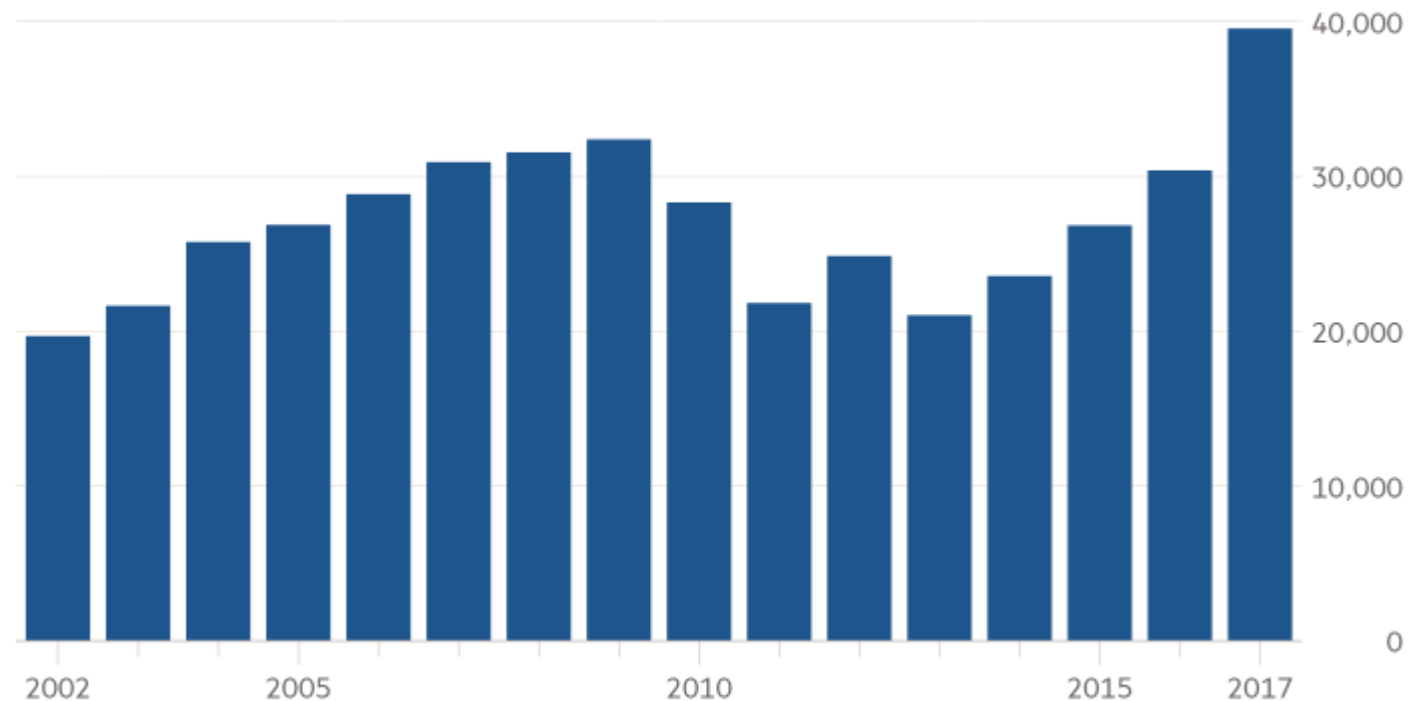
Khan was expected to cruise to re-election in May 2020. Coronavirus has delayed the election until May 2021, and he is likely to win again by a landslide, due to weak opposition.

Although London has elected a Conservative mayor twice in the last 13 years, it is an increasingly Labour city

# Sadiq Khan can claim some success in increasing the rate of new homebuilding since 2016

## House building in London

Net new homes built in London (financial years)

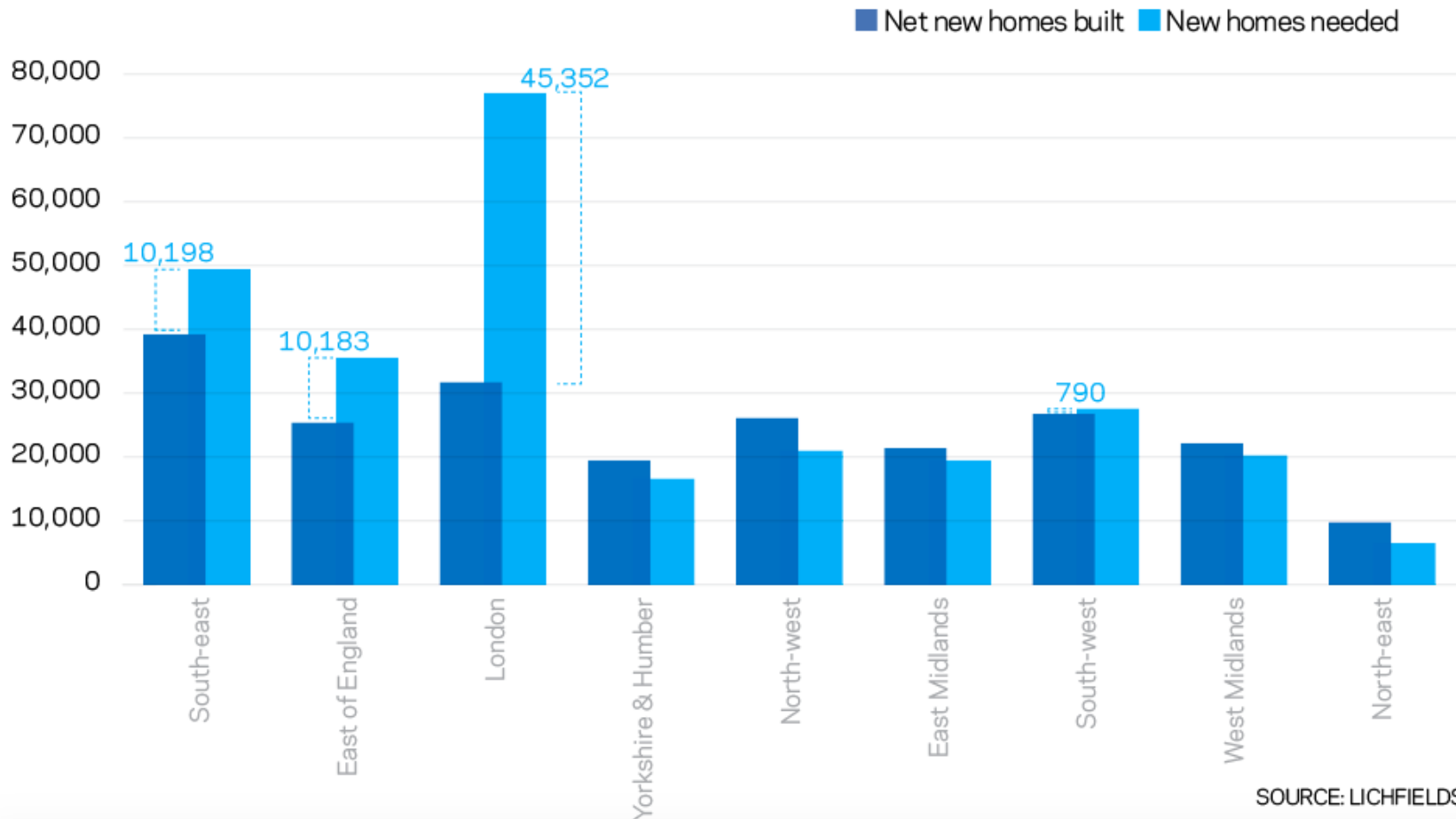


Source: MHCLG

© FT

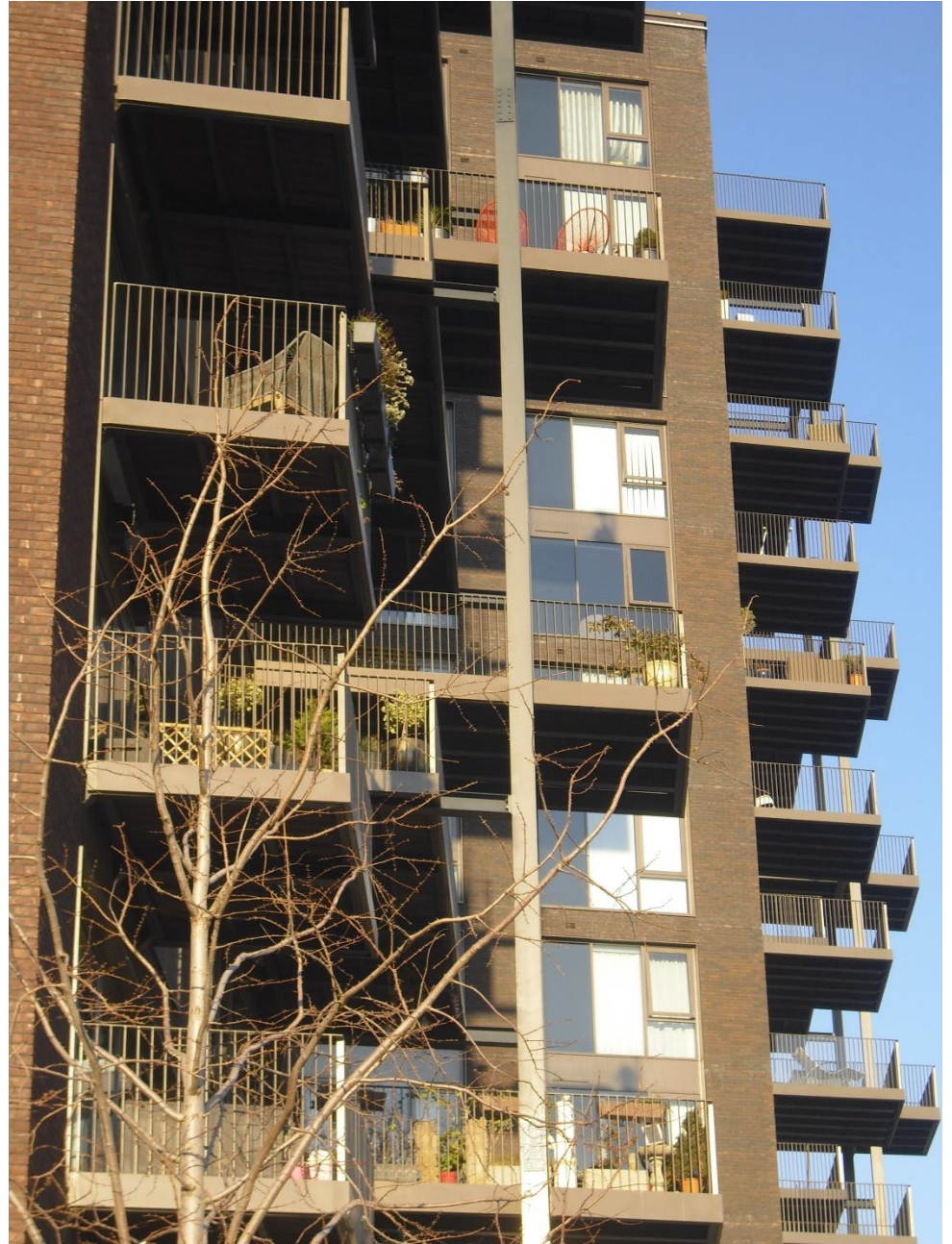


But the number of new homes – particularly genuinely affordable ones – still falls well short of what is needed



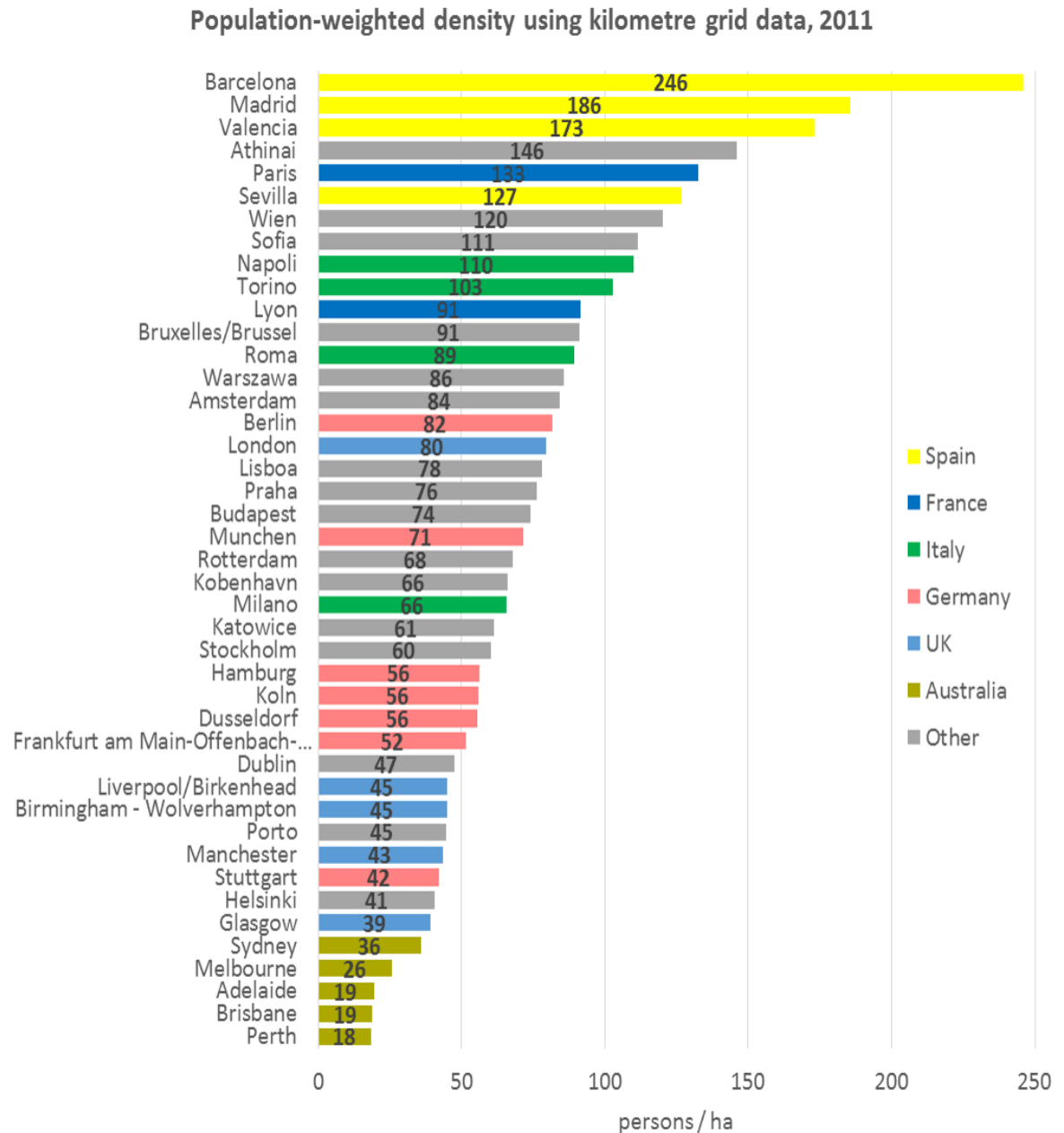
How can it be, in a wealthy city of 8.6 million people, that rehousing the 100 households displaced by the Grenfell Tower fire of 2017 proved such a challenge? Although it was an immense tragedy, the number of homes lost in the fire was the same as the number lost in an average night during the World War Two blitz

With ongoing  
austerity and the  
distraction of  
Brexit, most  
discussion about  
housing is the  
number of new  
units and how  
affordable they are  
– not the quality of  
new development





Many new developments in London are very high density – but overall London is less than half as dense as Madrid and 30% less dense than Paris

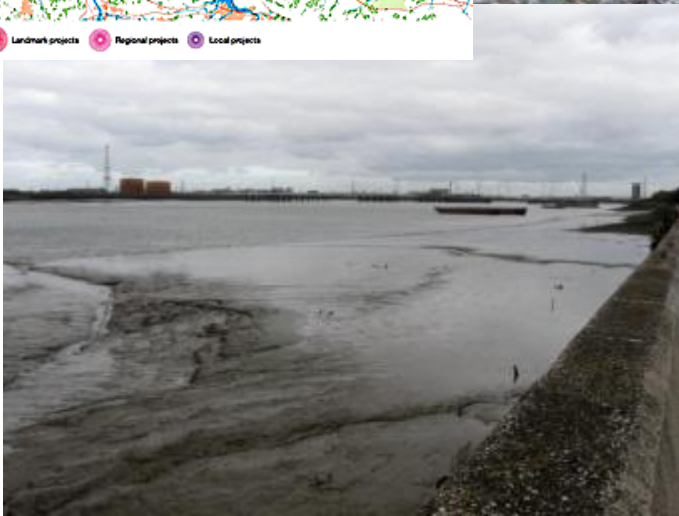
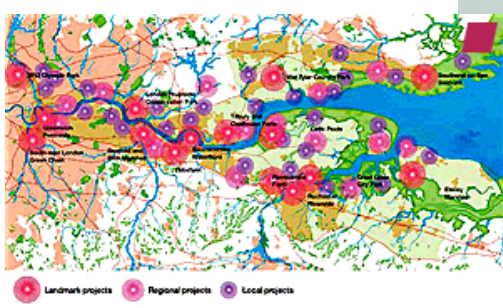


# Projects delivered by both Mayors have generally been well-received





The Thames Gateway – an eastwards extension of London Docklands – is seen as a priority for growth. But the “Gateway” had a major image problem and ambitious targets for 180,000 new jobs and 160,000 new homes between 2001-2016 have proved to be fantasy. The problem is that too few people want to live there





London's growth since the late 1990s has partly been down to global factors: the rise of financial services, and the rebirth of post-industrial cities



But it has also been helped by a cross-party consensus between the Mayor, Government and Boroughs that growth and infrastructure investment are good things in their own right





London since the 1990s has become more comfortable with post-war modernity. The Alexandra Road estate in Camden (1972-78) was listed in 1993, and Goldfinger House in 2013. The Royal Festival Hall and National Theatre have been restored and rehabilitated





Although the skyline has changed utterly since 1945, “protected view” policies mean that St Paul's is still not surrounded by towers. Echoes of Canaletto’s view of London, painted in 1746, could be still be felt during the Jubilee River Pageant of 2012



London is finally getting round to completing the redevelopment of troubled sites, such as King's Cross





Battersea Power Station – empty for 30 years and subject to umpteen failed regeneration plans – is finally being revived





... and Nine Elms nearby – which will see Covent Garden Market redeveloped again 40 years after its relocation



Yet more new towers are under construction, or newly completed, in the City: the Walkie Talkie (20 Fenchurch Street), the Cheesegrater (Leadenhall Building), and 22 Bishopsgate (originally called the Helter Skelter before a redesign)



In all cases, the sites of these new towers were previously occupied by indifferent 1960s blocks





At 306m high,  
Renzo Piano's  
Shard is the  
tallest building  
not only in  
London and the  
UK, but in all the  
EU



The 1,000-foot Tulip Tower (proposed to be built alongside the Gherkin) would be London's tallest yet, but may be blocked by the GLA because of its impact on views of the Tower of London, and the lack of free access to the viewing platform at the top



The Shard's arrival was seen as an assault on the London skyline





But once completed, Londoners have accepted it and even grown fond of it



New Thames bridges have been built, proposed – or abandoned in the case of the Garden Bridge, which has incurred costs of £53m with nothing to show for it





The London 2012 Olympics were a huge success – but there are concerns over whether Stratford City will really work. A “village” it is not





# Coronavirus

When the pandemic started in early 2020 London was hit much harder than any other part of the UK. This underscores what an important, globally connected economic centre London is, but also shows how vulnerable it can be to pandemics, terrorism and other extreme events.

As of March 2021, the economic damage is considerable, and will be explored more next week.



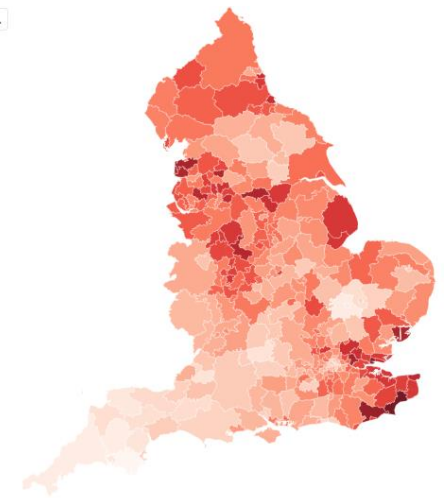
However, London has in fact had a lower death rate than most other English regions

## Deaths with COVID-19 on the death certificate by area

Total number of deaths since the start of the pandemic of people whose death certificate mentioned COVID-19 as one of the causes. The data are published weekly by the ONS, NRS and NISRA and there is a lag in reporting of at least 11 days because the data are based on death registrations. Only data available for the latest reported date are shown.

[UK](#) [Nation](#) [Region](#) [Upper tier LA](#) [Lower tier LA](#) [About](#)

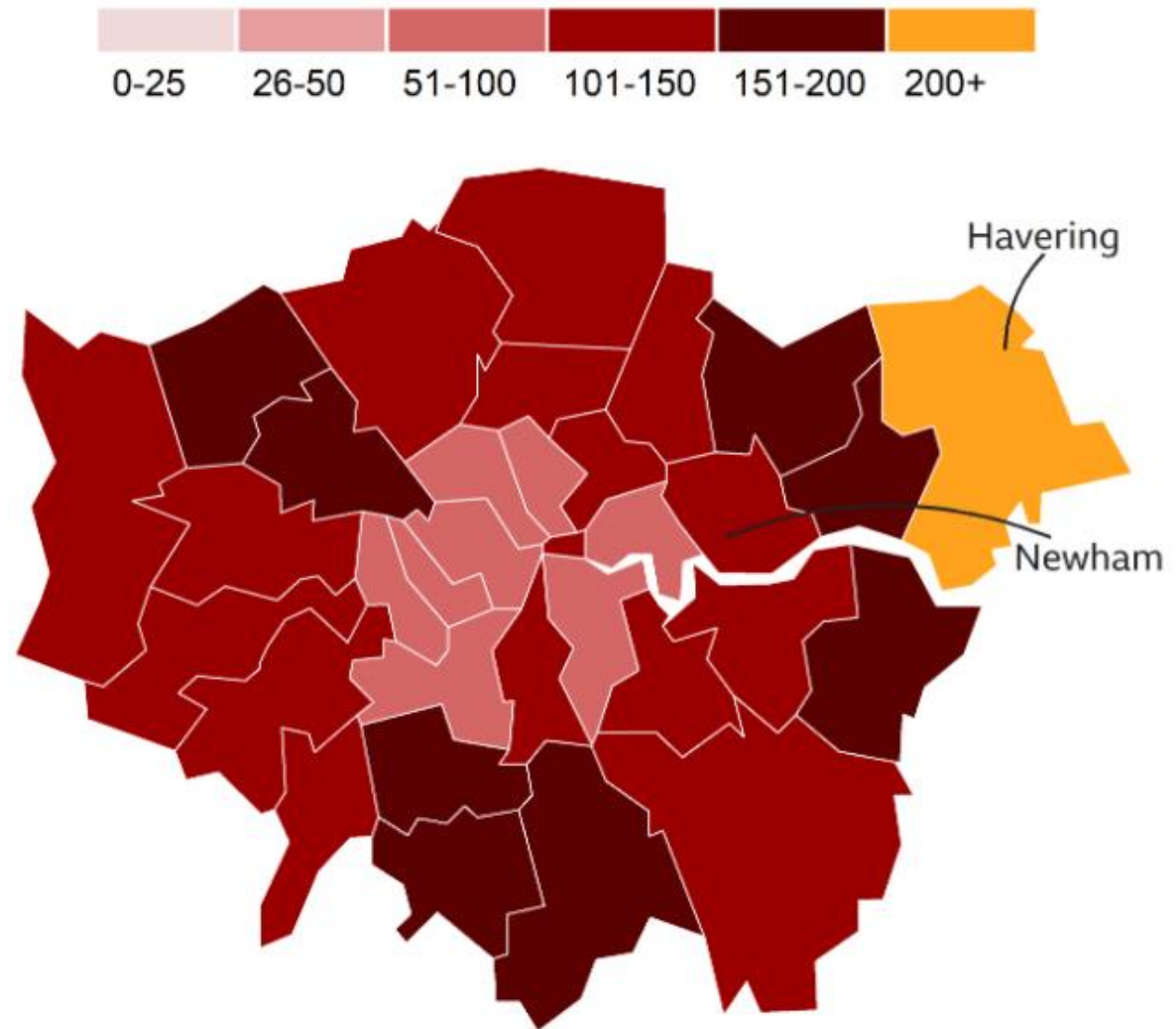
Area ▼	Deaths ▲	Rate per 100,000 population ▲
Yorkshire and The Humber	12,255	222.7
West Midlands	14,623	246.4
South West	7,913	140.7
South East	20,031	218.2
North West	19,525	266
North East	6,690	250.6
London	18,541	206.9
East of England	14,587	233.9
East Midlands	11,111	229.8



And within London, inner boroughs (whose population is younger) have seen much lower death rates than outer ones. The highest death rate of all is in Havering, the easternmost borough, which has the highest proportion of over-65s of all 32 boroughs. Hackney, the most deprived borough, has seen about average death rates

## Total coronavirus deaths in London

Deaths per 100,000 people since the start of the pandemic of those who died within 28 days of a positive test





Although it has below-average infection and death rates, London has seen the highest rate of employees on furlough of any English region, because of the dominance of the service sector in the capital's economy.

How many of these jobs survive long-term remains to be seen.

What impact has COVID had on the part of London you live in (or know best)

What changes do you think will be the most serious, or long-lasting?

How best can London recover health-wise, economically and culturally?

That's it for today



Next week, we'll look at three parts of London that are undergoing huge change: Woolwich, Victoria and Stratford.

We'll then try and draw some conclusions from the three case studies, and then turn to London's future Challenges.