



Link  
Wentworth

# Insights from London

June 2023 Report



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## Acknowledgement of Country

Link Wentworth wishes to acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the Land on which we work and pay our respect to the Elders both past, present and emerging, and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

*\* Disclaimer: The report provides an overview of a study tour undertaken in September 2022 and the commentary in this report reflects the views of Link Wentworth only.*

Front cover: Peabody Chair, Bob Kerslake and CEO Ian McDermott with Rose Jackson MP, Mike Allen, Margaret Maljkovic, Andrew McNulty at the House of Lords, London





I'm proud to share this report detailing Link Wentworth's 2022 Study Tour of London's housing associations, which we embarked on from 1 to 7 September. A trip that, funnily enough, came about almost by chance.

# Introduction

It was April 2022, and we had just hosted our first advocacy event, "The Big Housing Debate", featuring a number of esteemed speakers from the housing sector, politics, academia and finance. One of those speakers was the Shadow Minister for Water, Housing and Homelessness, The Hon. Rose Jackson MLC, who mentioned she was planning to visit London later in the year to learn about their housing sector. Having been born and brought up in London and having worked in the vibrant London Sector for 15 years prior to migrating to Australia in 2007, Rose asked if I had any contacts to share.

After reaching out to several former colleagues, friends and bosses, I was overwhelmed by the warmth and level of enthusiasm in their response. This led me to reflect on the immense value of a study tour and how the learnings of such a significantly large and mature sector could benefit our own in Australia. It prompted me to check with Rose and organise a Link Wentworth delegation of our own, including Chair Mike Allen, Chief Customer Officer Margaret Maljkovic and myself.

Reaching out to friends at Peabody, London & Quadrant, Newlon and Jigsaw Homes, and of course the Stonebridge estate, quickly saw an agenda develop which exceeded my expectations. I'm immeasurably grateful that we seized the opportunity to pack our bags and go – and am keen to share some of our experiences and learning.

During our eight-day tour, we experienced the sheer scale of the community housing industry in the UK from some of the largest providers. We saw how all levels of government worked together to make affordable, accessible housing a priority. We saw how partnerships with developers, financiers and builders led to win-win scenarios and how banks saw value in committing billions to the industry each year.

And through all this strategic initiative and collaboration, we bore witness to incredible outcomes—from award-winning designs to top-tier quality materials to aspirational resident outcomes. We saw how literally thousands of secure, low-cost homes can be created each year that benefit people and enrich communities.

We have a great number of highlights to share from the trip and even more learnings contained here in this report, which I'm pleased to share with you.

But before I direct you to the next page, I wanted to share my favourite moment from the trip—one that isn't as easily summarised in a dot point but has just as much, if not more, to say about our industry than the facts and figures.

On the Sunday morning, I had the privilege of taking my Link Wentworth colleagues and Rose Jackson around the Stonebridge Estate, where I worked as the Chief Officer and Development Director on the site's regeneration for eight and a half years. During the tour, we ran into two residents who, to my delight, said hello, asked what I was up to and whether I still worked at Stonebridge – because they hadn't seen me for ages. I was floored. Despite 15 years and a few different oceans, these people still recognised me as a member of their community – a place where I am immensely proud to have listened, worked and played a part in the positive transformation of an area close to where I was brought up.

It was a perfect example of what the housing sector is truly about: Building and maintaining communities,

making connections, looking out for your neighbour. It demonstrated the enormous impact that creating quality housing, jobs, inclusive communities where people can thrive really has, and how once you play a part in placemaking, you never truly leave.

It also reminded me of what we were there to fight for. The trip emboldened me to work smarter and more strategically and ambitiously for better housing outcomes for all Australians.

As such, I sincerely hope the learnings contained in this report become a reality for our country in the not-too-distant future and we follow some of the positive learnings from the UK by creating a stronger, larger and more capable sector – which can advocate and also deliver more homes and inclusive communities for those in need.

**Andrew McNulty**  
Chief Executive Officer



# Key insights



## Commitment from all levels of government

We need all levels of government to work in partnership with the community housing sector and the private sector to deliver housing as part of a shared vision.



## Outcomes over ownership

A key learning from London, is that Government(s) act as policy agents, regulators, part-funders and facilitators, rather than long-term land or social housing owners.

This has significantly scaled up the volume of homes delivered and built the capacity of CHPs.



## A layered approach to funding

Funding of social and affordable housing through UK Housing Associations has been reasonably simple and sustainable. Land and assets have been transferred at market or discounted value, grants provided, and private finance leveraged. Keeping funding simple has facilitated scale.



## CHP sector has to take a leading role

In Australia, keep it simple and **put the subsidy where the benefit will be retained for generations.**

It is up to CHPs to take a leading role—to build capacity through mergers and partnerships and share knowledge among the sector, leading to greater innovations and faster delivery.



## Prioritise planning and policy

New South Wales needs to streamline our planning processes and policies to prioritise and facilitate the delivery of social and affordable housing within reasonable timeframes.

Our housing policy needs to have a 20–30-year focus, going beyond election cycles. The current planning and housing system in NSW is broken so we must act strategically and innovate.



## Offer a range of affordable tenure options, including shared ownership

We must look at all housing options—from social and affordable, which we already deliver in Australia, to shared ownership, which has taken off with success in the UK.



## Invest in good quality materials and design

With increased density there is a need for increased quality, and a focus on lifecycle and cost in use for tenants.

By investing in smart building and neighbourhood design, coupled with durable quality and finishes, Australia's CHPs can deliver future-ready and people-centred homes.



## Always focus on the customer

While remaining ambitious about providing more new homes for those in need, we must continue to adopt a 'customer first' approach which encourages tenant empowerment, community building and wellbeing initiatives





# Our hosts

The UK is home to thousands of registered community housing providers—‘housing associations’—which provide low-cost rental housing to the community, as well as shared ownership initiatives. We were honoured to be hosted by the following four leading organisations, together with a visit to the Stonebridge Estate, each of which has delivered remarkable outcomes for their residents and communities.

*Ian McDermott,  
Peabody CEO*





## Peabody

At 160 years old, Peabody is one of the oldest and largest housing associations in the UK—owning 104,000 homes across London and the Home Counties, serving 220,000 customers. They completed 866 new homes in the 2021-22 financial year—74% of which were affordable and shared ownership.



## London & Quadrant (L&Q)

London & Quadrant (L&Q) have the largest development program of any housing association in London with 4,157 homes delivered last financial year. They currently house over 250,000 people in 120,000 homes across London and the South East.

L&Q are at the forefront in delivering shared ownership housing and have a development plan to build over 30,000 homes in the next 10 years.



## Newlon Housing Trust

Newlon Housing Trust owns or manages 8,200 homes in London, primarily in the north and east of the city. Their homes are mainly affordable or shared ownership, with 1,000 designed to serve those with greater needs.



## Jigsaw Homes

Jigsaw Homes operates in the Midlands and North-West England, with 35,000 homes. They are thought leaders in Environment, Social and Governance.

**We had the pleasure of touring a number of housing developments and regeneration schemes across London. With an emphasis on design, quality and density, as well as the thoughtful incorporation of outdoor space and community hubs, the developments we toured delivered a number of significant learnings on how housing can be delivered at such a large and innovative scale.**

Featuring a mixture of social housing, affordable housing, private and shared ownership, each development and/or neighbourhood product was delivered thanks to layers of partnerships and funding agreements—allowing a premium product to be accessed by people on varying incomes.





Australia is in the grips of an era-defining housing crisis. Despite increasing rates of homelessness and housing stress, there is a woeful lack of social and affordable housing supply to meet the demand.

# Key insights in more detail

With a new Federal and NSW State governments that have both signalled their willingness to address the crisis, the Australian community housing sector is at a crossroads of enormous opportunity and challenge. It's time to seriously rethink how we scale up the long-term and large-scale delivery of housing to address the massive shortfall.

We're best placed to build upon some of the learnings from the UK—a country that has many political and economic similarities to ours—and apply them here, unlocking enormous potential and providing life-changing solutions to those in our society who need it the most.



Barking Riverside with host  
Matthew Carpen





### 1 Commitment from all levels of government

In the UK, all levels of government work in partnership with the community housing sector and the private sector to deliver affordable housing. There is a shared vision to create long-term solutions beyond the four-year election cycle. Housing policy is taken as a serious issue—both in terms of its social and economic importance.

Following the Federal government's commitment to establish the Housing Australia Future Fund, Australia is at a critical stage wherein we have the opportunity to act strategically, leverage the knowledge and expertise of the community housing sector, and extract more value, quality and quantity from the Federal and State investment in housing.



### 2 Outcomes over ownership

In Australia, our governments are overly focused on growing their housing balance sheet, which significantly restricts the potential growth of social housing in many states. In the UK, government at all levels almost exclusively act as policy agents, regulators, part funders and facilitators, rather than land or social housing owners. This approach ensures an effective layering of funding and opens more opportunity within the sector, allowing for the delivery of the strategic objective—providing as much social and affordable housing as possible.



### 3 A layered approach to funding

The homes built, owned, and managed by CHPs in London over the past 50 plus years has led to the financially strong, robust and entrepreneurial sector that serves the capital today.

The funding of social and affordable housing through Housing Associations has at its core been reasonably simple and sustainable. Land and assets have been transferred usually at a significant discount to market value, grants have been provided, and private finance has been leveraged in.

As the organisations are now increasingly strong and sophisticated, market sale housing and joint ventures are being delivered to increase the volume of cross subsidy to pay for social and affordable housing outcomes. This has helped fill the gap of reduced

grant, whilst private finance has taken the form of sophisticated private bond placements.

There is a clear example of simplicity. Investment via superannuation funds and capital markets flow directly to the Housing Association—often borrowed off balance sheet. As the Group CFO from London and Quadrant Waqar Ahmed, eloquently puts it, “Mortgaging our past to pay for our future”.



#### 4 CHP sector has to take a leading role

As not-for-profit organisations that reinvest surpluses back into housing stock for low-income residents, Australia's Community Housing Providers are well positioned—financially, strategically and ethically—to partner with government and private sector stakeholders, including developers and investors, to increase the supply of social and affordable housing and to manage tenancies with customer-centric, resident focused expertise.

It is up to us to take a leading role—to build capacity through mergers and partnerships and share knowledge among the sector. In the UK, there was a noted air of collegiality and camaraderie among organisations, leading to greater innovations and faster delivery.

Taking a leading role in the future, will include working with government to enable the sector to lead on projects, manage and mitigate greater risks, including leading on market sales within projects—thereby recycling capital into delivering more social and affordable homes than is currently the accepted norm.

Following the NSW State election in March 2023, there is also the exciting opportunity to work with the new Government and Minister Jackson to deliver on the commitment to address the housing crisis.



#### 5 Prioritise planning and policy

In order to sufficiently address the urgency of the housing crisis and deliver a large number of much-needed homes quickly, New South Wales must streamline our planning processes and policies for the delivery of Social & Affordable housing. When all levels of government are committed to housing outcomes, like they are in the UK, approvals and processes are prioritised and projects can be delivered in a reasonable timeframe – with reduced cost and risk.

Currently, development in New South Wales is impeded by processes that can add years to a project. With shared understanding, clear housing and planning policies, targets and commitments, we can create a reliable pipeline of new projects and house more people in quality homes, faster.

Our housing policy needs to have a 20–30-year focus, going beyond election cycles. Without looking longer term, we may not have the courage to make policy and structural changes to how land is valued, social housing assets are owned, and how funding for social and affordable housing projects are successfully layered in order to deliver more homes at scale.

The current planning and housing system in NSW is broken so we must act strategically and innovate.



#### 6 Offer a range of affordable tenure options, including shared ownership

In addressing our housing crisis, we must look at all housing options—from social and affordable, which we already deliver in Australia, to shared ownership, which has taken off with success in the UK. In Australia, we have small schemes operating in a number of states and plans for a federal and NSW government scheme but not the maturity of the UK model. Shared ownership opens up fruitful and exciting possibilities for first-home buyers on lower incomes.

Additionally, by establishing new neighbourhoods with a mixture of social housing, affordable housing, shared ownership and privately owned properties, communities are able to develop positively and with diversity at their core.





## 7 Invest in good quality materials and design

In the UK, there is a marked increase in density for each project, ensuring the largest number of homes are produced in good locations next to transport and services. But with their focus on increased density came a greater focus on the quality of design so despite the higher number of dwellings per build, the finished results didn't seem cramped or overdeveloped.

As a comparison, it is clear that the early phases of the Stonebridge redevelopment (completed around 1999/2000), if developed now are likely to require a density of 2 or even 3 times what was built a little over 20 years ago.

It was also very clear that the Grenfell disaster, has and will continue to have, a lasting impact on the way homes are designed, built, maintained and

re-furnished in the UK. There is a far greater focus on build quality, specification of materials, life-cycle costings, cost in use, together with warranties and long-term accountability.

There was also a move away from parking spaces, instead investing in walkability and proximity to essential services and transport.

Public art, too, is a prominent feature of London developments, which not only signals the existence of a rich and cultured neighbourhood but serves to banish any lingering stigmas and stereotypes.

By investing in smart building and neighbourhood design, coupled with durable quality and finishes, Australia's housing sector can deliver even more homes to more people, which are future-proofed and people-centred.



## 8 Always focus on the customer

While remaining ambitious about growth and the continued delivery of housing, Australia's community housing providers must continue to adopt a 'customer-first' approach.

Despite their enormous scale, organisations like Peabody, London & Quadrant, Jigsaw and more modest sized CHPs like Newlon, continue to lead in community building and neighbourhood initiatives. They take their resident feedback and wellbeing seriously—Jigsaw, for instance, releases a 'Tenant Annual Report' each year, and invites a resident representative to serve on the Board.

In London, the Mayor requires tenant engagement and buy-in before a regeneration scheme or redevelopment goes ahead, ensuring all residents are informed and empowered through the process.



# Itinerary:

1 September 2022 – 7 September 2022

Day 1	Day 2*	Day 3	Day 4*	Day 5*	Day 6	Day 7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Walking tour of social housing in the London Borough of Southwark, one of the oldest parts of London. Tour conducted by Peabody's Historian</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Company overview &amp; discussion with London &amp; Quadrant Chair and Executive.</li> <li>Site tour of former brewery site in Walthamstow</li> <li>Site tour of Clarendon, Wood Green (S.106)</li> <li>Site tour of Millbrook, Mill Hill</li> </ul> <p><i>London &amp; Quadrant have 120,000 homes</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meeting with Chair of Jigsaw Homes (South) &amp; Levelling Up England executive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Walking tour of Stonebridge Estate, London NW10</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meeting with Peabody</li> <li>Tour of Thamesmead 20,000 home estate redevelopment and expansion</li> <li>Site tour of Friary Park, estate renewal</li> <li>Site tour of St John's Hill, estate renewal</li> <li>Afternoon tea at House of Lords with Lord Bob Kerslake</li> </ul> <p><i>Peabody have 104,000 homes</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meeting with Newlon Housing Trust</li> <li>Site tour of the Social Housing developed as part of Arsenal stadium redevelopment</li> <li>Tour of shared ownership homes @ Hale Works &amp; Millstream Tower</li> <li>Dinner with London &amp; Quadrant Chair and Executive team</li> </ul> <p><i>Newlon have 8,000 homes</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meeting with London &amp; Quadrant</li> <li>Site tour of Barking Riverside</li> <li>30,000 home new-build with new tube station and wharf on the Thames</li> </ul>

\*Joined by Rose Jackson MP on Day 2, Day 4 and Day 5.





# Day 1

## Walking tour – Southwark

The study tour commenced with a walking tour of social housing in the London Borough of Southwark. This is one of the oldest parts of London and the tour was led by Ian McDermott, Peabody CEO and their historian, Christine Wagg.







Peabody was founded in 1862, by George Peabody, an American philanthropist who made London his home. Living in his adopted home of London and witnessing the poverty he saw around him, led to his vision to create better housing for the poor of London. His legacy has endured and today the Peabody Group manages over 104,000 homes.





# Day 2

## London & Quadrant properties tour

London & Quadrant, one of the largest housing associations in London hosted a tour of former brewery site in Walthamstow, Clarendon, Wood Green and Millbrook, Mill Hill.

They manage over 120,000 homes primarily across London and the South East.







Walthamstow Brewery site, London & Quadrant,  
with Chair Aubrey Adams and Vicky Savage



## Day 3

# Meetings with Jigsaw Homes South and Levelling Up England

Our Saturday morning was spent in meetings with Jigsaw Homes South Chair, Tim Ryan and Levelling-up England's Charlotte Shepherd in Nottingham discussing urban renewal and addressing social disadvantage.

This was followed by some R&R watching Nottingham's home team, Nottingham Forest!



A huge highlight for the trip was meeting the Chair of Peabody, Lord Bob Kerslake and the CEO of Peabody, Ian McDermott. We had the privilege of being toured around the House of Lords, discussing housing policy in a private dining room with Lord Bob Kerslake.

Andrew McNulty, said, "One of the main takeaway moments for me on the whole trip was when we described delivering social housing in New South Wales. If we were trying to buy land from government and specifically from a government department responsible for delivering social housing, the base position is that we need to buy the land at market value. Lord Bob Kerslake, who was the most senior civil servant in the UK for a number of years, described us having to buy land for social housing off government at market value as being quote 'ludicrous'. It shows that we need to rethink how we layer funding and how we contribute to the delivery of housing supply in New South Wales and broader in Australia." ▲





# Day 4

## Stonebridge Estate

Once regarded as the worst housing estate in London, title was transferred from the London Borough of Brent to Stonebridge Housing Action Trust to comprehensively redevelop the 1,775-property estate which was home to 6,000 people. The objective was not just to redevelop the estate, but to ensure that as much of the economic benefit of the renewal as possible flowed into creating jobs, training, educational and health outcome to the people living there.

Once substantially de-risked and the majority of households re-housed, the estate was then transferred to Hillside Housing Trust (part of the Hyde Group) for completion of the final two phases and on-going management.





The former Stonebridge Estate's towers have now gone and have been replaced by award-winning low-rise family housing, with high quality communal landscaped areas, shops and facilities, co-designed with the community.

Stonebridge is a great example of successful urban regeneration and crime has been significantly reduced.



It was noted that if Stonebridge was redeveloped in 2023, the overall density required is likely to be at least double of what was delivered in 2000.



# Day 5

## South Thamesmead

### Peabody

- 20,000 new homes, mixed tenure
- A new library and public square
- 750 hectares of land,  
65% owned by Peabody Group
- GBP 9 billion planned investment
- 240 hectares of parkland,  
5km River Thames frontage







# St John's Hill

## Peabody

- 1930s Peabody estate identified for regeneration
- 652 additional homes, five new buildings
- New public spaces, community centre and transport routes
- Delivered in three phases
- Award-winning<sup>1</sup> brickwork and design

<sup>1</sup> Winner of the RIBA Regional and Housing Design Brick Award 2017 for Phase One of the development. Winner of the Sunday Times British Homes Award. Winner of the Homebuilder of the Year Award



*The Link Wentworth delegation were guests of Peabody CEO, Ian McDermott at the Peabody Corporate Box at Royal Albert Hall. The box is held in perpetuity and was bequeathed by their founder George Peabody in the 19th century and is used to host tenants, staff and guests of Peabody.*



# Day 6

## Arsenal redevelopment

### Newlon Housing Trust

- One of Europe's largest regeneration programs
- 1,500 new homes—with social housing the Council's No. 1 priority
- Delivered as part of the new Arsenal football stadium
- New waste transfer station built to create new stadium site

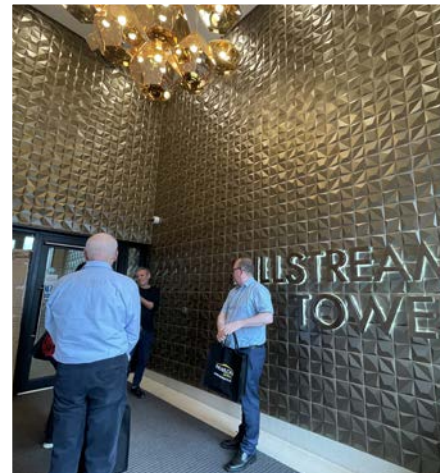
#### Shared ownership

Shared ownership or shared equity gives first-home buyers on low incomes the opportunity to get on the housing ladder. Depending on the scheme, residents purchase an initial share of 25 to 75% of the property's value and then pay subsidised rent on the remaining portion, increasing their share until they own 100% of the property.

Gathering information and touring shared ownership developments in London was of huge benefit to our contingent. While shared equity schemes

do already operate on a small scale in Victoria, Western Australia, South Australia, Tasmania and the ACT, and recently in NSW, there is a Federal plan to deliver 10,000 nationally. It was significant therefore to derive learnings from the UK's much more mature industry. Around 8% of all new homes constructed in London are shared ownership.

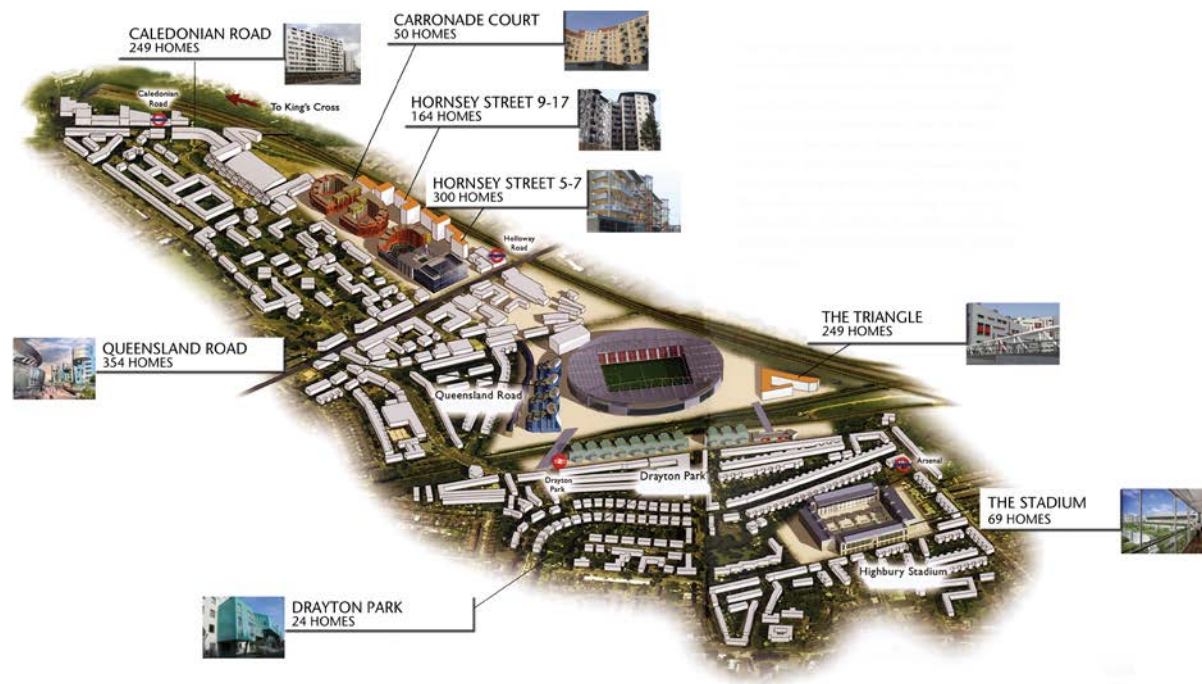
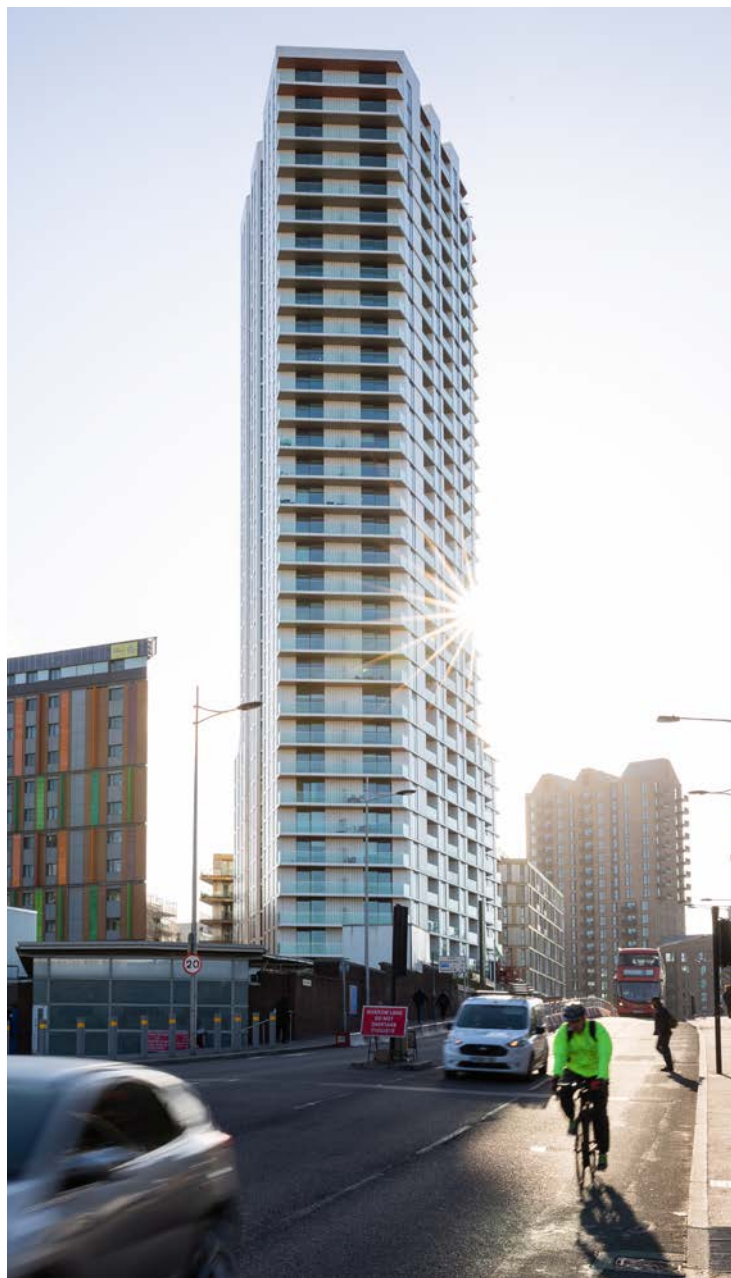
We were pleased to tour two of Newlon Housing Trust's developments, which are a mixture of shared ownership, and private sale properties.



## Millstream Tower

### Newlon Housing Trust

- 117 shared ownership, 11 private sale



# Hale Works

## Newlon Housing Trust

- 235 private sales, 44 shared ownership





# Day 7

## Barking Riverside

### London & Quadrant

- Capacity for 30,000 new homes
- One of Europe's largest mixed-use placemaking projects
- New tube station, public spaces, retail hubs and community centres
- 2km River Thames frontage, with a new wharf



*An automated underground waste collection system eliminates the need for garbage bins and garbage trucks, significantly providing more open and pedestrian space and improving the amenity of the area.*

*The highly sophisticated system enables recycling to be analysed, enabling targeted education to address cross-contamination issues.*









The Honourable Rose Jackson MLC is the NSW Minister for Water, Housing, Homelessness, Mental Health, Youth, and and the North Coast. At the time of the study tour, she was Shadow Minister for Water, Housing and Homelessness.

We were pleased to have Rose join our delegation for a few days to learn more about the housing sector in the UK, and how their impressive scale could be mirrored in Australia.

We sat down with Rose in late 2022 to gather her reflections on the trip and what she has taken away from the experience.



## Reflections from Rose Jackson

### **What are your impressions of the community housing organisations we met in London?**

The scale they were working in was really impressive. Their level of professionalism, their capacity to deliver housing at a scale that's quite unfamiliar here in Australia. Their concern for their residents was also quite striking as well—that came up a lot. They were clearly very professional, very astute organisations.

### **In terms of working with government or other stakeholders, did you have any learnings or takeaways in terms of building relationships and getting projects off the ground and delivered?**

Like in Australia, these particularly big projects need to be done collaboratively. I think there's no path forward that doesn't involve all the different kinds of interests and elements working together. You saw some of the organisations there had, for example, people like Lord Bob Kerslake as Chair of the Board of Peabody Housing—so there's a kind of very obvious relationship there between someone who's a political leader and the community housing sector. So

I suppose those collaborative relationships are clearly very important.

I think if we just rely on one sector or one segment to try and deal with the challenges we're facing with housing affordability, it's clearly not going to work. Evidently, between the federal government in the UK, the City of London, the Mayor of London, the community housing providers, the local councils—there are lots of interlinkages and relationships that were really important in ensuring those particularly big projects got off the ground.

### **Do you have any impressions about the quality of the collaboration when you look at what was happening in London versus what happens here? It sounds like you're describing some really strong collaboration at all levels.**

I talk to stakeholders all the time, so I have some familiarity with the universal frustrations that people have working with government. Certainly they existed—frustrations with moving goalposts, pipelines, funding challenges—similar in London as in New South Wales. But it did seem there was a shared drive to deliver affordable housing that went



right from government down to the community housing providers and that was interesting.

They were evidently working together for the same important goal. You're always going to have hiccups, ups, downs, gripes, but if you have that shared purpose, it really helps to overcome those.

**Were there any standout building design or community building initiatives that you took note of?**

There were just some gorgeous buildings, particularly with curved features, art installations, stunning colours. There was real attention to detail—even just in terms of things like garage doors—that really struck me.

I did reflect on the use of brick being quite prominent there, and that was evidently as a result of the Grenfell Tower tragedy. There's been a real push to lift building material standards after that and the community housing industry has had to take that on. There's a cost associated with that but it just looked stunning walking around these places.

And you do contrast that with social housing here in Australia where—to be honest—they're often seen as an eyesore. There's often a bit of a sense that, yes we're delivering public housing but we're trying to deliver it as cheaply as possible so it's going to look ugly. And I think that's a real shame, that attitude.

A lot of the colours and the detail and the art and the design and the curves in the bricks—one of the buildings, they were explaining, had beautiful Italian charcoal bricks—it looked stunning. I think that is important because it's always hard to deliver density, to deliver more housing, and you do often get pushback. But if people get a sense that what is brought into their community is going to be really pleasing to the eye and will add to the ambience of the community, I think that will overcome some of those objections.

**What would you say is your one main takeaway from the trip?**

My main takeaway is that when the political will is there, housing can be delivered. It can be delivered well and it can be delivered quickly.

I saw that Mayor Sadiq Khan and the City of London had just decided that they were going to try and deal with the housing affordability challenges in London. They made that a priority, they set their shoulder to the wheel behind that and that made a real difference. They had the partners there in the community housing providers and they were at a scale that was possible for them to link into that priority quite quickly and easily. But once that commitment was there, the delivery was really fast tracked: *We're going to do this, we're going to regenerate estates, we're going to do it well, we're going to deliver more housing.*

**It sounds like a really exciting trip with some great insights.**

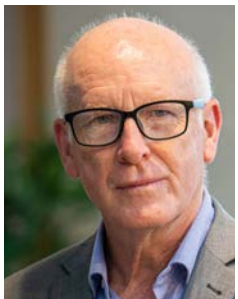
**It was fantastic to be able to link up and share this experience with Mike and Andrew and Margaret. I found it really eye opening.**

Another really interesting thing I observed over there and that I should mention was the way that the Mayor required resident buy-in to the regenerations, so the residents were voting as to whether they wanted the schemes to proceed. And I thought that was really interesting, because I'm quite keen for regeneration to happen, and maybe your initial impression would be this would be a block to that because people resist change and they're perhaps nervous about the unknown.

But in a way what it had done is forced everyone who was part of that project to really engage with residents, really ensure what was being delivered was an improvement—and when that happened, there was incredible buy-in, there was an incredible partnership between the residents, community housing providers and government. I thought that was quite different to what we see in Australia which is often, particularly with the Land and Housing Corporation, much less engaged with residents as part of those projects.

It was just such a fantastic opportunity to see a different—and in a way better—model for delivering those massive benefits that can come from regeneration and making that case to residents was really powerful.

**A key insight from Rose was the commitment from all levels of Government which existed, “When the political will is there, housing can be delivered, it can be delivered well, and it can be delivered quickly”**



## Reflections from Mike Allen PSM Chair, Link Wentworth

### **Can you talk me through your first impressions of the study tour?**

My immediate impression of the study tour was just how warmly we were welcomed by the organisations that we were visiting. They were completely open to sharing information, sharing their experiences, indeed even sharing documentation. Their warm welcome was enormously positive and got the tour off to a fabulous start.

### **What are your impressions of the community housing organisations in London?**

My immediate impression of community housing associations in London was their size and scale. We visited three different organisations, one smaller that was a similar size to Link Wentworth, but also two larger ones that had in excess of a hundred thousand properties in both cases. My immediate impression was just the scale of their operations and what level of engagement they had across all sectors with their national government, with their local government, but also with local community housing and social service organisations.

### **What do you see as the key differences between Australia and the UK community housing sector and specifically their operating environments?**

The community housing sector in the UK has had a much longer history than we have in Australia. Indeed, one of the organisations that we visited had been in existence for 160 years, so their size and scale and their representation in the housing marketplace was substantially larger than community housing organisations here in Australia. But it also gave us insight into the opportunities that exists for community housing organisations in our own country to grow and develop and to play a much larger role in the housing system in Australia.



**In terms of working with government or other stakeholders, did you have any learnings or takeaways in terms of building relationships and getting projects off the ground and delivered?**

I was most impressed with the level of integration in the housing system in the UK. There was a much closer working relationship between the housing associations and all levels of government.

For example, we discussed planning approval timeframes and their planning system for code compliant development is much faster and much more streamlined than the planning arrangements here in New South Wales and elsewhere around Australia. They were embarrassed with one project that took them nine months in the planning approval phase. They regularly indicated that there were much faster timeframes for planning approval. That makes a huge difference in getting a project up and running and providing the benefit of new housing for the eventual residents at a much earlier stage than we experience here in our own country.

**Was there any standout building design or community building initiatives that you took note of?**

One of the real standouts of all the projects that we visited, was that every single one was constructed out of brick or brick panels. This was in part a reaction to the Grenfell fire and the dreadful tragedy that occurred there when external cladding caught fire and so many people lost their lives. Every building we saw, both for sale, affordable rental, and for shared ownership, were all brick buildings. They looked excellent and from a landlord's perspective, a much easier product to maintain over time in the life cycle of a building.

**You mentioned the range of types of housing that the providers were building. Can you talk a little bit about the quality of the build from social through to affordable through to market?**

Out of all the projects that we saw, the different tenures were indistinguishable from one another. Projects were built to a very high standard, in fact, some of the best build quality I've seen in my somewhat lengthy career, and that was extremely impressive. But you couldn't tell the difference between properties that were constructed for market sale versus those that were constructed for shared ownership or indeed, those that were constructed for social rental or affordable rental. That's a really important point, particularly for residents in social housing to not have their home being able to be distinguished in some way from the homes of other people that are living around them.

**What would you say is your one main takeaway from the trip?**

It's hard to say what the key takeaway from the trip was because there were really so many, but I think there really are three for me. Firstly, was the level of shared ownership. It was very substantial, 20 to 30% of all projects that we saw were for shared ownership. It's a longstanding product in the UK, in existence for some decades now. There are some critical learnings for us, particularly in Sydney, a similar high-cost property market to London. We can take away some important initiatives from that.

The other is the speed of the planning process. They were able to produce new projects in less than half the time that we would here in New South Wales, in some cases even faster than that. The opportunity to provide that housing benefit to future residents much faster, would make such a difference in the lives of people that we are here to assist.

The third one for me was just the positive and collegiate relationship that operated across all levels of government with housing associations.

Housing associations were seen as valuable and experienced partners. There was a great deal of respect that operated across all those different levels that in fact made the production of new housing, particularly affordable and social rental housing, much easier to do and much faster.



# Reflections from Margaret Maljkovic

Chief Customer Officer, Link Wentworth

## Can you talk me through your first impressions of the study tour?

I was amazed by the scale, the size and the maturity of the community housing sector and the significant contribution that the sector was making to the increase in growth of social and affordable housing. The sector is focussed on enhancing the lives of social housing tenants and social housing communities, and the communities seem to be very strongly at the centre of their service delivery, including their development and their new supply.

The other thing that I felt privileged about, was that our CEO has had some very strong relationships and is well-respected with community housing organisations in London.

Through his relationships, we gained access to those providers, and their generosity with their time and sharing information and knowledge with us was amazing.

## Can you tell us a little bit more about how the community housing providers in London put community first and considered the tenant voice through their work?

One of the things that I was very impressed with was the way they put community at the centre. For example, community housing providers have a much larger asset base, including estates and concentrations of housing that need redevelopment. They look at those communities from a social perspective and asset perspective where redevelopment is possible, and then they put it to a vote to the community.

If they don't get a majority of vote, the redevelopment doesn't go ahead.



What that means is, at the very outset, when you start thinking about what you're going to do with this community, your purpose and your outcome is around meeting the needs of the residents. They're your customer, and that's who you're designing for.

When they're redeveloping, they consult the people that are going to be moving, find out what their needs are, and then they design around what their needs are. In Australia, the way that we tend to approach larger redevelopments is we look at the social and asset indicators as well as where you can maximise some return where there is a potential to redevelop through the market. We tend to then move tenants out of that site so that it's clear to get redeveloped.

The key difference that I saw was in London, the customer has a very strong voice. The community has the voice because they are the ones that you are designing for. They are going to stay there, they are the end customer. The bedroom configurations, the design, their specific needs were all taken into account in the construction. Whereas in the Australian context, the actual clients who are living in that

community may or may not end up being the end customer. So that's a very vastly different approach.

**Did you see any other key differences between the sector in London and Australia?**

The sector's a lot larger, it's a lot more mature and they significantly add to new supply.

One of the providers in particular, London & Quadrant (L&Q), has a very huge supply program. They've got over 100,000 properties and they build something like 5,000 properties a year—that's just one provider in London in a highly dense community and population. That showed me what potential there is.

They collaborate with government or complement what the government or the council does. They get some grants to meet specific housing needs, a subsidy, but they don't rely on those grants. They develop, they sell, and that sale provides social and affordable housing.

The government focus is the outcome rather than the vehicle by which the outcome is achieved. Tapping into the resources that community housing providers can access, like finances, just means that more outcomes are delivered.

**You've mentioned the scale of the industry. Do you think this contributes to a more positive broader community view of social housing? Do you think it helps with the associated stigma?**

One of the observations that I made was that the scale of social housing is a lot more significant as a proportion of overall housing. In England, it's about 16.5% compared to 4% in Australia.

It means that a lot more people do actually live in social housing or know someone in social housing.

Social housing is also a lot more dispersed throughout communities. In some areas, the presence is obviously a lot higher. It then means that social housing tenants have a real voice. Whereas in Australia, homeowners and investors tend to have more of the voice than renters overall. Social housing tenants are very much a residual small minority that unfortunately don't have the same sort of voice or political focus.

**Was there any standout building design or community building initiatives that you took note of?**

One of the developments that I was really impressed with was Barking Riverside. That was a community London & Quadrant were developing. The scale that they were building was something around 15,000 homes of social, affordable and market housing. The scale was impressive.

The other thing that was impressive was that they were investing upfront in transport and improving the amenity and the value of the area.

With my long history in the housing space, I have seen housing built first and then the infrastructure later. Whereas they were very much invested upfront before they started to get a return, which meant that it was much better for the residents and increased the value as well. It was win-win.

**Can you talk me through your first impressions of the study tour?**

The tour to London was very interesting for me because I worked for 15 years in London in the community housing sector prior to coming to Australia. Now I'm really at that tipping point of also having 15 years' experience here in Australia. It was interesting to see how much the sector in London had grown in the last 15 years, the number of mergers that had taken place, and the vast increase in cross subsidy from private sale and expansion of the shared ownership market. Interestingly, around 8% of all new homes that are constructed in London are shared ownership; that was a phenomenally interesting perspective to me.

I was overwhelmed with how welcomed we were and the generosity of former colleagues and friends in organising such an incredible tour. These organisations spent an immense amount of energy to really show us some of the amazing things they're involved in.

One of my big impressions from the tour was the importance of the layering of funding and the support from different levels of government. Local government, London-wide government and national government are clearly focused on solving the problem of housing shortage, affordability, and homelessness. There was a real sharing of resources and the sector—as a result being one of the main channelers for that energy—had quite frankly grown into a phenomenal range of organisations.

**What are your impressions of the community housing organisations in London?**

What I noticed about the community housing sector going back to London for this study tour is that it remains incredibly collegiate. People are very open about sharing ideas and innovations to benefit people in housing need. Customers remain at the centre of people's conversations. When we met chairs of boards and CEOs, they were very, very focused on the tenant outcome and tenant wellbeing, which was really reassuring to see with organisations which were of the scale of Peabody and London & Quadrant particularly.

The entrepreneurial flare of the London housing associations was frankly quite incredible. They were now cross subsidising housing for sale to deliver more social and affordable homes.

The leadership of the sector was eye-opening and inspirational. There are many things that we can learn from London and be bold and ambitious in the future to try and mirror this in Sydney and wider New South Wales.

**What do you see as the key differences between Australia and the UK community housing sector and specifically their operating environments?**

The key differences between the Australian and the UK community housing sector and the operating environment are quite stark. I think the biggest one for me was that all levels of government in the UK are really focused on housing being an issue and something which needs to be solved. There seems to be less competition between the different levels of government in the UK.

There is a clear acknowledgement that government doesn't necessarily need to be the delivery agent, but government does need to be involved in facilitating land, facilitating policy, and bringing together the various players.

It's very clear that the housing association movement in the UK has been selected over 40 years as being the agent where the energy from the private sector and the energy from the government is focused. This has led to a layering of funding and a layering of policy that can produce many, many thousands of homes per year. I think the collegiate nature of the UK housing market is quite eye-opening. There's not the competition between the sectors, the government sector and the not-profit sector and the private sector that impedes good ideas from happening.

**In terms of working with government or other stakeholders, did you have any learnings or takeaways in terms of building relationships and getting projects off the ground and delivered?**

One of the biggest takeaways was the pipeline of annual projects—governments change at different levels, at local, London and national level, but the consistency was that



# Reflections from Andrew McAnulty CEO, Link Wentworth



housing remained a priority—it wasn't a stop and start process.

All levels of government were interested in prioritising making land available. There is a clear separation between policy enabling, regulation and delivery. This really facilitated strategic thinking around prioritisation and outcomes.

Since I have been back in Australia, I have focussed on what that could mean for a city like Sydney. We have 33 Sydney councils and if each council aimed to facilitate—not provide—several small sites for say 50 social and affordable homes per year, this would create around 1,650 homes every year. Over a 10-year period, that would be 16,500 homes in Sydney. It made me reflect on developing a strategy where we are not asking councils to do, but we're asking councils to facilitate.

A fundamental barrier in Australian policy is about the ownership of the asset. It doesn't matter who owns the homes, but whoever does, is usually best placed to hold the debt and leverage the outcomes. In the UK, community housing providers or housing associations as they're called in London, tend to be the ones who do grow and do get the policy geared towards them, because they're not afraid of holding billions of pounds worth of debt finance and growing the number of homes.

Getting the delivery vehicle and policy right, and not competing, but getting clear about who owns properties, is going to be an interesting takeaway for Australia, especially when we've got a fabulous opportunity in front of us with the Housing Australia Future Fund. How do we layer in funding, from the federal government, land from state government, and community housing providers' ability to raise debt finance, to optimise the number of homes that can be provided? Then like we've seen in the UK, not just do it for one year, two years or three, but let's see what change would look like if we did that over the next 40 years.

### Was there any standout building design or building initiatives that you took note of?

There was a significant increase in density on all the projects we saw and with this increased density, there was a real focus on quality of design. The buildings that we were looking at didn't seem like they were crammed in or that there was too many on a site. There was quite a lot of public art incorporated in the fabric of the buildings, which I thought was quite mesmerising in some instances. Noticeably, there was also a huge reduction in parking compared with when I was working in the community housing sector in London 15 years ago. If a site was near a train station or a tube station, parking was generally zero in most instances or very, very low.

Another observation was that London & Quadrant were acting as the builder for about a third of their new homes, not just the master developer, which I thought was a huge leap forward. The quality of the homes that they were responsible for building was, again, first class.

The scale of what was being achieved was so noticeable because the two largest organisations we visited,

Peabody and London & Quadrant were building roughly 8,000 homes per year. When you think about that volume of supply of social and affordable homes coming into a city from two organisations, again that was staggering.

### What would you say are your main takeaways from the trip?

Number one was the layering of government support and prioritisation of housing. It was so amazing to see local government, London-wide government and federal government all focussed on housing supply and social and affordable housing supply as an element of that.

The capacity of the community housing sector in London was absolutely staggering. It showed that we as a sector and as collection of governments within Australia, we can do more. We can partner more, and we should be ambitious.

A huge highlight for the trip was meeting the Chair and CEO of Peabody. The chair is Lord Bob Kerslake, and the CEO is a former colleague of mine, Ian MacDermott. We had an afternoon where we had the privilege of being toured around the House of Lords, discussing housing policy in a private dining room with Lord Bob Kerslake.

A key takeaway moment for me was when we were describing delivering social housing in New South Wales and trying to buy land from government—even from a government department responsible for delivering social housing—the base position is that we need to buy the land at market value. Lord Bob Kerslake, who was the most senior civil servant in the UK for several years, described us having to buy land for social housing off government at market value as being quote “ludicrous”. So, I think it shows that we need to rethink how we layer funding and how we contribute to the delivery of housing supply in New South Wales and broader Australia.

I hope the learnings that we bring forward from our trip to London can really be implemented in different ways in Sydney and broader Australia, because there's plenty of things we can learn from overseas, things that we don't want to do in Australia and things that we should maybe push and explore and try to achieve here.

# Thank you and acknowledgements

## Peabody Housing

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**Lord Bob Kerslake**  
Chair

**Ian McDermott**  
CEO

**Phil Jenkins**  
Executive Director  
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## London & Quadrant

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