

## A CALL TO CENTRE CARE IN THE LONDON PLAN REVIEW

A paper by *Co Produce It CIC*<sup>i</sup> and *Just Space*<sup>ii</sup> with support from the *Bartlett Development Planning Unit, UCL* as part of the Horizon Europe funded *Fairville Project - Facing inequalities and democratic challenges through co-production*<sup>iii</sup>.

## POSITIONING THE CARING CITY AS AN ALTERNATIVE ORGANISING PRINCIPLE FOR PLANNING IN LONDON

For the London Plan to be considered *sound* under the **2024 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)** it must be *justified*. That is, it must demonstrate itself to be **‘an appropriate strategy, taking into account the reasonable alternatives, and based on proportionate evidence’** (p.12).

Against this requirement, **Just Space** calls on the Greater London Authority (GLA) team to give due consideration to **‘the caring city’** as an alternative organising principle for planning in London and, in so doing, adopt a care-led approach to planning throughout the London Plan Review Process.

The call to centre care in London Planning is in keeping with our network’s long-standing demand for a change of course in London planning – away from a growth first developers’ approach to planning for London’s future; and towards a planning approach that forefronts the development of a more just city for all its people.

As the GLA’s City Intelligence Unit launches its sixth edition of its annual **State of London Report**, marked by gaping contrasts between, on the one hand, claims of a strong post-Covid recovery, economic resilience and high performance in ‘indices of global city comparisons’, and high poverty rates and record levels of rough sleeping on the other, the need to consider alternative approaches and metrics is clear.

## WHAT IS THE CARING CITY AND HOW DOES IT RELATE TO PLANNING?

In 2022, **Just Space** published our **Community-led Recovery Plan**<sup>iv</sup> anchored by the call for London to become a ‘caring city’, defining this imagination as a city which **‘takes care of people and nature, respecting and valuing those who are neglected or viewed as minorities, caring for its existing buildings and homes’**. To deliver this vision, we argued collectively that the objective of planning should be (re)orientated **‘to meet needs, correct disadvantages and support the flourishing of people, communities and the environment’**(p.10).

Building from an initial focus on the acute needs of under-valued and under-paid formal care sector workers highlighted by the pandemic, we have evolved a reading of ‘the caring city’ as a system wide approach, calling for a care-led planning approach that spreads across different sectors– from housing to the environment, the local economy to transport and governance. A caring London comes together around **lifetime neighbourhoods of care**, the neighbourhood being the place where people get together and where inequalities need to be addressed<sup>v</sup>. **Lifetime neighbourhoods of care** directly address the climate crisis and also promote food justice as part of a wider push for spatial justice. They link together digital hubs, community centres, local food hubs, care hubs and community improvement districts.<sup>vi</sup>

## HOW DOES THE CARING CITY / CARE-LED PLANNING RESPOND TO 2024 NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK (NPPF) + 2022 HEALTHY AND SAFE COMMUNITIES GUIDANCE DOCUMENT

Placing care-led planning at the centre of the London Plan Review is essential if the Greater London Authority (GLA) is to meaningfully deliver on the [2024 NPPF's](#) stated social objective to ‘**support strong, vibrant and healthy communities**’ by safeguarding the provision of ‘**housing**’, ‘**places**’, ‘**services**’ and ‘**open-spaces**’ ‘**that reflect current and future needs and support communities’ health, social and cultural well-being**’ (p.5). Key here is the explicit recognition that community health and wellbeing (*its care*) is determined by far more than the formal provision of primary, secondary and tertiary care facilities.

Advancing a care-led plan for London should also be seen as consistent with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government’s (MCHLG’s) [2022 Healthy and Safe Communities Guidance Document](#) which positions planning as central to ‘**creating environments that support and encourage healthy lifestyles**’; ‘**identifying and securing the facilities needed for primary, secondary and tertiary care, and the wider health and care system**’<sup>vii</sup>; and producing ‘**healthy places**’ -understood as those ‘**which supports and promotes healthy behaviours and environments and a reduction in health inequalities for people of all ages**’ and which provide opportunities to improve ‘**physical and mental health, and support community engagement and wellbeing.**’<sup>viii</sup>

Consistent with the [2024 NPPF](#), this guidance document positions caring for the health and wellbeing of communities as a cross-cutting objective of planning rather than a standalone / sectoral issue. For example, the document makes explicit provision for planning and planners to take a proactive role in the promotion of ‘**healthier food environment[s]**’. Here, the document calls on planning authorities to support ‘**opportunities for communities to access a wide range of healthier food production and consumption choices**’.<sup>ix</sup>

## HOW OTHER CITIES ARE ALREADY EMBRACING / IMPLEMENTING THE CARING CITY

[Just Space’s](#) deployment of ‘the caring city’ concept can be seen as coherent with an incipient international turn towards care – a turn that is rooted in, **but not bounded to**, the feminist recognition that care labour is a gendered and racialised issue<sup>x</sup> and that the devaluation of this issue is a key driver of inequality.

When outlining pathways towards centring care in questions of city development, the [2022 United Cities and Local Government](#)<sup>xi</sup>(UCLG) [Gold VI Report](#) emphasises the fact that ‘**caring does not only consist of doing things, but also of anticipating and preventing certain negative outcomes**’<sup>xii</sup>. Through this definition, a caring municipality must play a role in both supporting the essential *doings* of care *now* whilst also improving the conditions in which care needs and responses will take place in *the future*. Taking seriously the latter requires municipalities to use planning processes and planning tools to both identify, defend and extend existing and missing neighbourhood care assets and redress care blockers in their diversity. Understood as such, contribution to care equity should become the primary lens through which decisions on questions of housing, the economy, social infrastructure, transport, public space, regeneration etc. should be taken.

Far from a marginal concern, care as an organising principle for urban planning and policy making is making strides in cities across the world. For three examples:

The city of **Seoul**, via a strategy titled “Going Together WithThe Socially Neglected” and a series of other related programs and policies, is advancing the concept of a “Caring City”. There, the city is read as an ‘environment of care’ in which urban space is to be (re)designed to support daily practices of care, active movement and lifestyles, the prevention of diseases and health disorders, and equal access to commodities and services for all citizens. More information about this approach can be read [here](#).

The city of **Barcelona** is progressing *a right to care and be cared for* on the understanding that care is “a basic need that structures communal life, coexistence, and solidarity between generations, and guarantees a decent life and participation in our communities, labour market, and every sphere of social life. To ensure that everyone can receive care and that care is provided under fair conditions for the whole of society, we need to work to make the way we care for each other and the way we are cared for fairer and more democratic” (Barcelona City Council in [UCLG 2023, p.2](#)). This right to care is being given life through spatial and planned interventions such as the social superblocks and, more recently, the Vila Veïna (Village of Neighbours). Initiatives with clear resonance to the [Just Space](#) network’s propositions around **lifetime neighbourhoods** and **care hubs**. More information about the social superblock and Vila Veïna approach can be found [here](#).

The city of **Bogota** has developed a masterplan with a clear orientation towards care and gender equality, the centrepiece of which is the inclusion of Care Blocks at the core of its territorial planning. Through the targeted delivery of 45 care blocks by 2035 (20+ of which are already in operation) the masterplan aims to develop ‘**an equitable and safe city for women and people in all their diversity**’. Centred around ‘anchor buildings’ which can be accessed within a 15–20-minute walk of caregiver’s homes, the Care Block initiative explicitly aims to recognize the contribution of caregivers to the city, to redistribute the responsibility of care-taking more equitably, and to reduce the proportion of women’s unpaid care work so that they can pursue personal development activities. For example, a Care Block can enable a caregiving parent/grandparent to enrol in a targeted education program whilst their child/grandchild is provided with supervised, playful activities. More information about the care block model can be found [here](#).

More broadly, United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG)’s current GOLD VII process is dedicated to surfacing how ‘local and regional governments can advance Economies of Equality and Care in their territories’. Their ongoing, collaborative [Multimedia Journal](#) acts as a repository of such initiatives. Key principles guiding this exploration is that cities that care are more just and equal, are more democratic and more sustainable<sup>xiii</sup>.

## End Notes:

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<sup>i</sup> [Co Produce It CIC](#) is a not for profit that supports projects developed with coproduction principles.

<sup>ii</sup> [Just Space](#) is a London-based network of more than 300 community groups seeking to influence London’s planning strategies by providing a collective voice for local communities. Central to our operation has been the coproduction of alternative planning documents including the [2016 Community-Led Plan for London](#), the [2022 Recovery Plan](#), and the [2024 Manifesto](#).

<sup>iii</sup>The Horizon [Fairville Project](#) (2023-2026) is an international research initiative funded by Horizon Europe. It aims to tackle urban inequalities and their impact on democracy by strengthening **co-production**—a

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collaborative approach that empowers communities disconnected from formal decision-making. Fairville advocates for **resourced participation, access to professional expertise, and stronger advocacy** to ensure meaningful **coproduction**. The project brings together civil society groups, researchers, advocacy organisations, and local authorities to address key issues: **the environment, risks, and access to decent housing**. It also emphasises **citizens' rights in the face of democratic decline**.

Fairville operates through **eight local labs** in Athens, Berlin, Brussels, Calarasi, Marseille, Cairo, Dakar, and London. The **Fairville London Lab** is working on supporting street markets in East London, particularly those under threat from gentrification such as Queens Market, Newham, Whitechapel Market, Tower Hamlets and Ridley Road Market in Hackney. On health we are part of the London Health Equity network and working with Equal Care Coop and Clapton Care Commons have piloted and evaluated a care recipient centred care project in Clapton, Hackney.

<sup>iv</sup>Published in April 2022, the **Just Space Recovery Plan** brings together a set of policies aimed to reverse the inequalities so brutally exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Produced by 60+ community groups and campaigners across London, it is a call to action for a positively different post-pandemic London: people-centred rather than development-centred.

<sup>v</sup> See previous work on 'Lifetime Neighbourhoods' in the **2016 Community-Led Plan for London** (pp.68-70); and in the **2024 Manifesto**(p.7).

<sup>vi</sup> Building on Lifetime Neighbourhood description in the **2024 Manifesto**(p.7).

<sup>vii</sup>**2022 HEALTHY AND SAFE COMMUNITIES GUIDANCE DOCUMENT**, Paragraph: 001 Reference ID:53-001-20190722

<sup>viii</sup>**2022 HEALTHY AND SAFE COMMUNITIES GUIDANCE DOCUMENT**, Paragraph: 004 Reference ID:53-004-20190722

<sup>ix</sup>**2022 HEALTHY AND SAFE COMMUNITIES GUIDANCE DOCUMENT**, Paragraph: 004 Reference ID:53-004-20190722

<sup>x</sup>Women, racialized individuals, people living in poverty and migrants are more likely to be caregivers. They are often rendered invisible and poorly paid, with limited representation in decision-making spaces' (**UCLG (2024), Gold VI Report, Ch.5 Caring, p.9**)

<sup>xi</sup>A global network of cities and local, regional and metropolitan government and their associations, committed to representing, defending and amplifying the voices of local and regional governments to leave no-one and no place behind (**UCLG, No date.**)

<sup>xii</sup>**UCLG (2024), Gold VI Report, Ch.5 Caring, p.7**

<sup>xiii</sup> See the Summary document: <https://uclg.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Conclusion-informe-1a-fase-V3.pdf>