



# FRESH THINKING FOR HOUSING

**A** safe place to live is a human right. But in London we are failing. The number of people left destitute to sleep on the streets is appalling, and this is just the most visible sign of a much bigger problem.

Our homeless people don't need sweeping up like fallen leaves into temporary homes.. We need to heal the tree – root and branch – the system that has too many gaps to fall through, and too much injustice.

System changes and power shifts are the most resilient changes we can make. Welfare must be fixed, because benefit caps and universal credit are making homelessness worse.

We must keep reforming the private rented sector, and fight together for better rights and the power to bring in rent controls.

We also need better rights for social housing and council tenants. Hard-won ballots for estate residents facing demolition are a start, but we need to put more tenants fully in control of homes.

Our existing homes need fixing too. Councils and housing associations already have a huge job to do on fire safety, and our next Mayor must assess the problem and make plans for the Green New Deal London needs.

## RIGHTS FOR TENANTS AND RENTERS

- ▶ A Green Mayor will work from day one for every Londoner to have their right to a decent, secure home respected, including the right to good standards, security from unfair evictions and protection from high rents.
- ▶ Throughout the pandemic, Sian Berry has stood up for the rights of renters, fighting for the eviction ban and proposing fair ways to cancel rent arrears built up, not turn them into debts. Landlords who need support should be able to claim it from Government. Greens will continue to campaign until renters are not made to bear the burden of the crisis.
- ▶ A Green Mayor would not accept any more delays on the promised abolition of no-fault evictions and section 21 of the Housing Act.
- ▶ We will campaign to scrap the benefit cap and maintain the emergency coronavirus increases to the Local Housing Allowance rate for housing benefit so that it at least covers 30 per cent of rented homes in any local area.
- ▶ Sian Berry pushed the current Mayor for more than three years before he started to argue for rent control powers for London, and London's renters need a real champion for this issue. These devolved powers are urgent and Greens will not go slow or give up on pressing for these powers, and we will work with mayors of other cities to win them.
- ▶ A Green Mayor will use these powers to set up a Rent Commission for London to decide on a new target level and downward trajectory for private rents, and immediately define the London Living Rent better to take account of the wage gaps faced by households led by women and African, Caribbean, Asian, Latino and other minority ethnic Londoners.
- ▶ We will bring in a two-year freeze for private rents while the new body completes its work and puts forward long-term, stable and predictable rent control plans.
- ▶ We will support the London Renters Union and other groups organising tenants from the grassroots, providing grants for them to expand and for new local groups to be set up, as proposed by Green Assembly Members in the most recent GLA budget. This will include groups representing students and migrants and refugees, as well as disabled tenants, to ensure their rights, including to adapted homes when needed, are respected.
- ▶ London will have its own Social Housing Commissioner, charged with supporting tenant rights, equality and empowerment in council and social-rented homes, and supporting active and thriving tenants' associations across London. They will be a tenant themselves and supported with the resources needed to empower resident groups across London.
- ▶ We will provide grants and support for new co-ops, including revolving loans for



## GREENS FIGHTING FOR RENTERS' RIGHTS

**S**ian Berry has been a private renter in London for nearly 25 years, and has championed renters' rights on the London Assembly right from the start, putting forward the idea of a London Renters Union in her manifesto for the 2016 election.

Before that, Sian wrote to Sadiq Khan while he was still an MP in 2015 asking him to help amend legislation to give rent control powers to city mayors. She continued to put pressure on the current Mayor for three years until, in late 2018, he finally took action.

Sian Berry will stand with millions of her fellow renters to strengthen their rights.

She will work with other Mayors from across the country, to campaign for the devolved powers we need to set rent controls, bring down runaway rents, forgive rent arrears accumulated during the pandemic, and end unfair evictions.

The current Mayor has been defeatist and slow when it comes to winning a better deal for housing. Sian Berry will be a committed champion for London's renters.

new groups, targeting the promotion of these services particularly towards key workers and people living in houses of multiple occupation who wish to take over the running of their homes, and to African, Caribbean, Asian, Latino and other minority ethnic Londoners.

- ▶ We will campaign at a national level for a right to co-op for people in shared houses, following up on research work by Sian Berry in the London Assembly.
- ▶ We will work to close the loopholes that leave property guardians in legal limbo, and put forward changes in the law to include property guardians in new rights for renters.
- ▶ We will amend the London Plan to better control short-term lettings in London, with strict limits - including prohibition in areas of high housing need - built into lease conditions for new buildings and give more support to councils in enforcing time limits and quality of life for surrounding residents.
- ▶ Much higher levels of truly affordable rented homes will be included in new planning policies for the Build to Rent sector.
- ▶ We've campaigned from the start for a Student Living Rent. After pressing the Mayor we have won requirements for a proportion of student accommodation to be affordable in the new London Plan, but we strongly believe that the Mayor's definition of this at 55 per cent of the maximum maintenance loan is too high, and a Green Mayor would work with

student unions and student campaign organisations to bring this down.

- ▶ We will support the calls from Green students to support students affected by the coronavirus crisis, including rent rebates, refunds and grants and support for mental health. We will also campaign for the national Green Party policy to write off student loan debts.
- ▶ Our new renting rules will include a default right for renters to keep pets. Greens on the London Assembly have campaigned for unfair pet clauses to be banned since 2016.

## NO MORE LOST COUNCIL HOMES

- ▶ A key power needed from housing devolution to London is the ability to stop the loss of council homes through Right to Buy. Every effort we make to build more council homes is currently neutralised by this policy. A Green Mayor will present evidence and campaign fiercely for an urgent suspension of Right to Buy in London.
- ▶ A Green Mayor will stop the loss of council homes through demolition. We will review all funding conditions for estate demolition projects, especially for those schemes that have not progressed since being signed off by the current Mayor before the ballot policy was announced in 2018. New, resident-led plans would be required, along with ballots for schemes that have stalled.



## WINNING A FINAL SAY WITH ESTATE BALLOTS

February 2018 saw a massive victory for residents on estates as the current Mayor u-turned on his estate ballots policy.

It was revealed that 95 per cent of responses to the draft estate guidance demanded ballots for residents, following our campaigning with residents across London.

As a result, the Mayor dramatically reversed his policy, after his draft guidance was explicitly against giving residents this final say.

The new guidance came into force in July 2018, making a resident ballot

compulsory before funding is given for demolition schemes. However, the new rules still have unfair restrictions from voting for different kinds of residents, including private renters.

The Mayor also allowed far too many schemes – 34 in total – to slip through the net, by giving them funding or planning permission in the long period of 11 months between the end of the consultation period and the final policy being announced.

Our policy will be to review all of these schemes that are not now underway, so we can require new plans and new ballots for residents.

- ▶ We will review all existing estate ballot exemptions. And we will prevent any council and social rented homes being converted to ‘affordable’ rent in new plans.
- ▶ A Green Mayor will bring estate ballots into planning policy by requiring grant applications from all demolition schemes to boost social housing numbers. Following problems with recent ballots, improved guidance will do more to involve residents in devising plans from the start and give firmer guidance on neutrality in ballot publicity.
- ▶ We will support the production of credible People’s Plans for residents on estates with a funded expert team in City Hall to help.
- ▶ A Green Mayor will add dramatically to the stock of low-cost rented homes by purchasing existing homes, with the GLA using grants and sustainable borrowing to buy homes from developers and landlords for renting at London Living Rent levels from councils and housing associations.
- ▶ We will also work with councils, housing associations and pension funds to build up a larger, collaborative revolving acquisition fund to expand this idea further.
- ▶ We will work in partnership with councils to make better use of prudential funding and borrowing mechanisms to buy back more homes previously lost under Right to Buy in order to bring these once again into council housing stock for letting under secure tenancies. This will mitigate the continued net loss of council homes in London which Sian has exposed, and create a pipeline of new homes far exceeding what is currently being built by councils.

## NEW COUNCIL AND LOW-COST RENTED HOMES FROM EXISTING HOUSING

- ▶ A Green Mayor will bring an end to the crisis in temporary accommodation by supporting and funding a rapid expansion of London Councils’ Capital Letters programme, which leases homes long-term from landlords at reasonable rates for councils to provide to people in housing need. This approach will save huge amounts compared with the very high cost to councils of often substandard nightly paid temporary accommodation, and can be funded by working in partnership with councils and minimal capital investment.

## CREATING THE NEW HOMES WE NEED

- ▶ A Green Mayor will correct mistakes made by the current Mayor in using the affordable housing grant money devolved from national government. The Mayor is moving too slowly and devoting too many grants to unaffordable shared ownership homes in future phases of long-term schemes, when more needs to go to

create council and social rented homes from those being built now.

- ▶ Billions risk lying unspent long after 2023 from the 2016-2023 grant programme unless something is done. Sian recently exposed that in mid-2020 £500 million was lying completely unallocated and useless. We will bring forward spending and also use money allocated to later phases of planned building programmes to convert homes already in planning or being constructed into new council and social housing.
- ▶ Our new planning policies will recognise that the current Mayor's 'London Affordable Rent' is not the same as social rent and seek to abolish all dodgy definitions of affordable housing for good.
- ▶ By presenting clear evidence and by campaigning alongside Londoners, we will win more funding and much more flexibility for new housing grants from the Government. This will include a push for more funding for the conversion of existing homes, and homes already under construction, into social rent homes, not just new builds.
- ▶ A Green Mayor's grants for new homes will not be for unaffordable shared ownership or 'affordable' rent, but be reserved for new council homes, social housing and community-led housing, with smaller grants available for London Living Rent homes. The grants will be provided on a sliding scale depending on the number of bedrooms to increase the level of family housing provided.
- ▶ We will scale up diversity in the housing market – creating new programmes to support councils, smaller housing associations, small builders and community models to build homes, including on small sites identified by our People's Land Commission.
- ▶ A Green Mayor will act now to support community led housing and co-ops in the city. The Mayor has left the majority of his Community Housing Fund unspent, and failed to put significant public land towards these new ideas.
- ▶ We will use the Mayor's Land Fund better and open up the London Development Board with more transparency and new members from tenant, resident and community housing groups.
- ▶ Using planning and funding powers, we will make sure more fully wheelchair accessible homes, built to the highest standards, are secured by councils and in planning decisions by the Mayor. Currently, a very small percentage of planned homes are fully wheelchair accessible, and there is an acute shortage of council homes for disabled Londoners.
- ▶ Housing needs projections must be improved so that boroughs make suitable provision for accessible and supported housing for young people who become adults with disabilities. This work is best coordinated at a London-wide level and we will make sure the GLA leads on this, and reviews allocations policies from councils to make sure they are available to people who need them.

- ▶ We will use research from here and abroad to build more intentional intergenerational properties and developments that better suit the lifecycle of families. This too will help support community building and can support reducing social care costs.
- ▶ We will address overcrowding in homes by conducting a borough by borough needs assessment, correcting gaps in current Government statistics, and putting together a strategy to better match people to homes across London, working with older Londoners' representatives to establish new Mayoral programmes to find ways to provide people who wish to downsize with genuinely attractive and desirable options, including co-housing.
- ▶ We will work with local authorities to support owner occupiers to take on lodgers, and provide GLA advice for potential lodgers, setting up a brokerage service, along with standards and a register of hosts, and policies to ensure fair rents and decent living conditions.
- ▶ A Green Mayor will campaign for a Community Right to Buy for land and buildings that community organisations wish to make use of, at a national level or the devolved powers to create this right in London.
- ▶ We will use small sites better, working alongside councils and communities to map spaces within local areas where new homes can fit, through a London-wide, bottom-up People's Land Commission.

○ SEE MORE ABOUT OUR PEOPLE'S LAND COMMISSION ON PAGE 59

# STOPPING POOR DOORS AND POOR PLAYGROUNDS

**G**reens on the London Assembly have pushed successfully for policies to prevent social division being built into new developments.

‘Poor doors’ where social and affordable housing residents have separate entrances and get inferior facilities are discriminatory and create unnecessary divisions and hierarchies between residents.

- ▶ We first highlighted the potential for ‘poor playgrounds’ – the horrific prospect of separate areas being built for children in different tenures to play in – in our response to the Mayor’s Housing Strategy.
- ▶ Although we have been successful in getting councils like Camden to write clear policies against these divisions into open spaces policies, the current Mayor has still not put watertight rules into his new London Plan, and a Green Mayor will correct this.



## FIXING OUR EXISTING HOMES

Fixing the shocking state of fire safety in our homes is a huge job for every kind of housing provider, thanks to years of deregulation by the Government and appalling work by big developers and contractors.

- ▶ A Green Mayor will take the lead at a strategic level, assess the work needed and make the case to ministers that our councils, housing associations, leaseholders and private landlords need specific funding and support to make our homes safe.
- ▶ Energy saving is as neglected and urgent as the safety work needed on our homes. Greens have been highlighting the lack of work on our many 19th and 20th century homes since a major report was produced in the early 2000s by Jean Lambert MEP. A Green Mayor will start on day one with a full, new assessment of the city's needs. We would use this to make plans and demands for huge investment in our housing, which will get the carbon emissions from our homes down to zero and show fuel poverty the door.
- ▶ For disabled people, bidding for council homes is far more difficult, and more time and help is needed to ensure homes can be viewed ahead of bidding and that necessary adjustments are planned in good time before moving in. Councils are responsible for this, but a Green Mayor will work with disabled people's groups

to review all council processes and make clear standards at a London level.

- ▶ We will campaign for deep reforms to leasehold, including caps on ground rents and limits on charges for major works, and campaign for changes to make commonhold and the right to manage easier to obtain for leaseholders.

○ SEE MORE ABOUT OUR GREEN NEW DEAL IN THE CHAPTER WE WILL CREATE THE GREENEST CITY IN THE WORLD

○ SEE MORE ABOUT HOMES AND SAFETY IN OUR CHAPTER ACTION FOR A SAFE AND HEALTHY CITY

## A PEOPLE'S LAND COMMISSION

**G**reens will put power back into the hands of Londoners by setting up a People's Land Commission.

Together, we will go out into our city, and find land for the things local people really want, like homes, community halls, small businesses, parks, playgrounds, theatres and youth centres.

When local people find plots of land which aren't being put to good use and would be suitable for small scale developments, a Green Mayor will provide the funding to put these ideas into action.

This is the fresh thinking on housing which London needs, and it will put the land under your feet back into your hands.

- ▶ Green Mayor will set up a People's Land Commission to help identify new sites and bring land together for more community-led housing projects
- ▶ Working with local people can lead to better outcomes and quicker results, with plans less likely to be challenged, and a wider variety of smaller

community-led and non-profit builders finding it easier to access land and try different models.

- ▶ With suitable sites identified and approved by the local community, the GLA and London's councils can use compulsory purchase powers where land is not already publicly owned to bring more land forward for development.
- ▶ Greens on the London Assembly have put together evidence showing that adding more homes on top of existing buildings, converting underused land from car parks and garages, and doing that creatively and with the community, could provide many more new homes than treating people's homes as 'brownfield land' and prioritising demolition schemes that break up communities and face fierce opposition.
- ▶ We also need a Community Right to Buy at a national level, or via devolved powers to London. These rights already exist in Scotland and are helping local communities to buy land and buildings and put them to use.

## HOMES FOR ALL LONDONERS

Greens on the London Assembly have worked to expose the problems faced by more and more Londoners who lose their homes every year through no fault of their own.

Families, young people, migrants, veterans, people with poor mental health or family problems, and people denied help by the benefits system, are all especially vulnerable to becoming homeless, along with private renters facing eviction.

Councils are struggling to provide enough temporary accommodation and the number of people forced to sleep on the streets has increased dramatically in central London in recent years.

Sian Berry's work on the Assembly has also helped expose the problem of hidden homelessness.

On any given night, more than 13 times as many people are in temporary homes, hiding from view on the streets, staying with friends and family or sofa surfing, than are counted in traditional surveys of homelessness.

Women, including those facing domestic abuse, young people and LGBTIQ+ Londoners are some of the worst affected, and only a minority of young people are even approaching councils for help as they feel like they will get no help.

Greens recently carried out research that found Londoners themselves are helping to pick up the pieces, with one in ten people taking in a friend or family member at

some point in the last year, giving them a place to stay when they have had nowhere else to go.

Sian Berry says:

"We need to fix a system that has too many gaps for people to fall through. The Mayor's office can help build more homes, and all the policies in this chapter are aimed at fixing fractures and injustice in our housing system.

"But City Hall can also take more action to fix the temporary accommodation crisis and improve the information and help people facing homelessness can access, and make services much more consistent between councils with fewer gaps."

To put street homelessness in London in the past where it belongs:

- ▶ A Green Mayor will fund and support more Housing First provision in London. This approach helps people with additional needs and vulnerabilities, such as people with mental health needs or people who are drug dependent, with an unconditional, non-institutional home so that they are more easily able to focus on their problems while remaining independent.
- ▶ We will fight for more funding from Government to make sure councils can fully respect people's right to help ahead of being evicted, as required by the Homelessness Reduction Act.
- ▶ We will push in Parliament for legislation that guarantees victims of domestic abuse the right to remain in their homes, if they wish, rather than the perpetrator,

and for this right to apply across all tenancies.

- ▶ A Green Mayor will create a new team within the homelessness service at City Hall focused specifically on reaching and supporting EU migrants who are at particular risk of homelessness already and face new problems as Brexit progresses.
- ▶ We will require local authorities to automatically record the protected characteristics of those presenting at housing options services, so we can see more evidence of discrimination in housing policies.
- ▶ We will make sure there is consistent and fair assessment by councils of 'vulnerability' and health needs, and increase support and targeted information for young people, families and LGBTIQ+ people facing homelessness, as well as people with medical needs who need support from their doctors.
- ▶ We will also help solve the crisis in temporary accommodation with our policies to create new council and low-rent homes from existing housing.
- ▶ We will make sure young people under 25 facing homelessness have the dedicated support they need, with separate accommodation and support work, and the right proportion of GLA funding set aside for this work.



# JOIN OUR TEAM

To get involved in our campaign to transform London, contact [team@london.greenparty.org.uk](mailto:team@london.greenparty.org.uk) or visit [www.sianberry.london](http://www.sianberry.london)

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