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NLQ 40th Issue Special: 40 Ideas for London

PLUS New Londoner of the Year: John Burns | Sounding Board | Lisa Walker | Victoria Hills



Meaningful Meanwhile

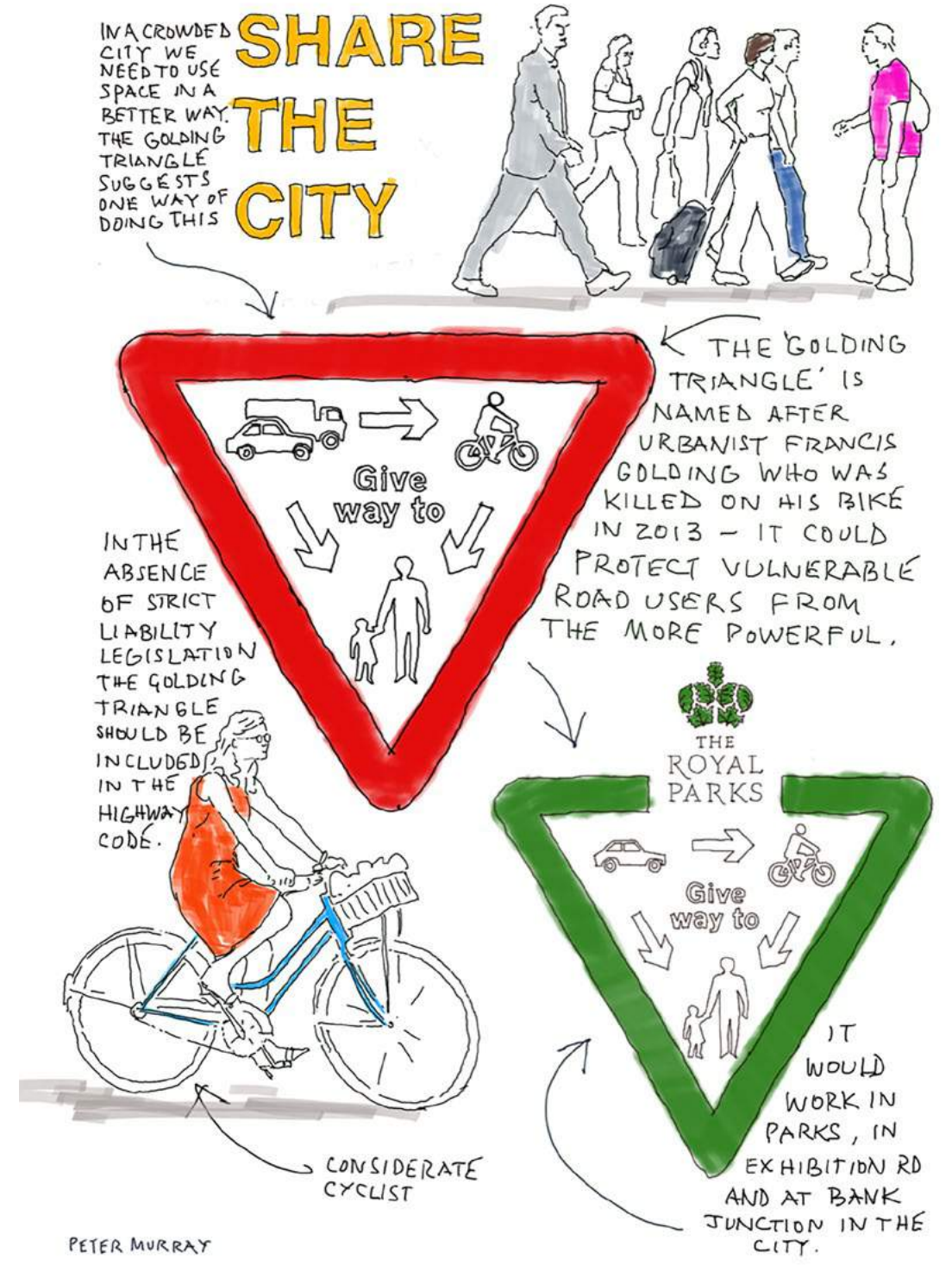
Claire Curtice, Feilden Fowles

‘Our idea for London is a framework where like-minded organisations with a strong social purpose can work in collaboration to regenerate brownfield pocket sites for meanwhile uses. Waterloo City Farm has been created on a formerly neglected plot south of Westminster Bridge (leased from Guy’s and St. Thomas’ Hospital). The 1700 sqm site has been transformed into a collective home for architects Feilden Fowles, and the charities Jamie’s Farm and Oasis Waterloo. The trio came together with a shared focus on education and belief that spaces for learning should be inspiring and uplifting. The farm serves Lambeth and Southwark, among the most deprived UK boroughs, and comprises animal pens, vegetable garden, outdoor kitchen, barn, classroom, walled garden and architects’ studio. This collaborative project has demonstrated clear social, economic and environmental benefits by transforming an overgrown, unsafe and inaccessible strip into an inviting support network for the locality, offering educational and public community programmes and events. Free initiative such as Oasis’ “Young Farmers” brings people together to encourage healthier lifestyles. Through animal-care and harvesting produce grown on site, young people can learn where food comes from and how to cook fresh and nutritious meals. The raised beds are designed at an accessible height to enable everyone to take part in gardening. All walkways are wheelchair-friendly and there is level access throughout. The temporary nature of the site’s lease has driven the barn, pens and studio buildings to be constructed from demountable timber frames meaning that all materials can be rebuilt or reused in the future. Waterloo City Farm is a model for “meaningful meanwhile”: reusing London’s brownfield plots, bringing together organisations united in a social purpose for the benefit of multiple communities. Meaningful meanwhile also serves as a testing ground for neighbourhood regeneration.’

A triple lock on public land sales

Jonny Anstead, TOWN

‘Across London, public land is being sold to private housing developers, contributing to the 66,000 new homes needed in the city each year. Little wonder that stretched local authorities are happy to oblige, selling off the family silver to help deliver local services. But in the dash to deliver new housing, quality is overlooked – encouraging the poorly-designed, overpriced, cookie-cutter, car-dependent housing that people, given a choice, would rather not live in. Why is this wastefulness of land so damaging? Because, unlike money, land is a non-renewable resource. When land leaves public ownership, it’s permanent. The 1972 Local Government Act requires local authorities to sell land for “the best consideration reasonably attainable”. It compels them to behave in the same way as private landowners: to obtain the highest possible price, with little regard to design, quality, wider local value, and sustainability. Some notable exceptions exist: Transport for London, through its Small Sites programme, has made available land on terms suited to smaller developers, focusing on quality, not just price. Lewisham Council has self-build housing by making land available on terms that make it possible for community builders to access it. Cambridge’s Marmalade Lane – a council-enabled cohousing development with communal spaces and shared resources – was codesigned owned and managed by its residents. The council’s procurement process had quality, not just price, at its heart. London should take inspiration: its 33 local authorities should commit to justifying all sale of public land on three counts: social, environmental as well as financial. This triple-lock would transform the culture of public land disposal. It would level the playing field, for a new generation of SME developers, non-profits and community building groups. And it would encourage the forms of housing that people want and need: homes that are better designed, more sustainable and more affordable.’



Peter Murray, NLA