

Unlocking **small sites** for homes at scale

AKERLOF

MMC advisory role

Greater London Authority client

Residential sector

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Boroughs own a lot of land but rarely know which of it could hold homes. Rising costs have broken conventional viability appraisals so sites get sold instead, reducing the ability to build later. The GLA funded this collaborative commission to help the London boroughs of Hounslow and Lambeth develop a process to unlock small sites, as pathfinders for a new blueprint for the capital. We brought four elements together as one unique system:

- Geospatial analysis of small sites across the borough displayed in an interactive mapping tool
- Targeted SME developer and contractor engagement, testing appetite and challenges
- A replicable pre-appraisal business case process, aligned to local priorities and existing governance
- An invest to save tool for temporary accommodation (TA) to assist with development viability.

WHAT WE DID

We listened first, to understand what each borough already does and where the pressure sits, then designed a process that slots into existing governance rather than replacing it. We worked with RCKa to guide the design and delivery of a geospatial tool that screens a borough's whole land database and shortlists sites in hours.

Working with the boroughs and drawing on the consortia's expertise, we built a five-stage recurrent appraisal process around the existing governance cycle, supported by user-friendly documents that feed each other to help teams build up the outline business case for sites. Alongside this, we mapped the funding and delivery routes open to a borough, so disposal to the market becomes an active choice rather than the default.

Key to our work was the development of an invest-to-save ready reckoner to allow teams to test what share of homes could be allocated for TA use and social rent to aid viability through TA subsidy savings.

THE IMPACT

- **Screened over 3,600 sites** across Hounslow and Lambeth's databases in hours, finding space for over 550 homes.
- **Built a repeatable process aligned to borough governance**, so appraising small sites becomes routine, not a one-off.
- **Shortlisted and provided the data for 15 real sites** in each borough, identifying the potential for over 380 homes ready for officers to unlock.
- **Quantified the prize:** the TA subsidy saving on these sites would save each borough over £1.3m a year.
- **Demonstrated moving 200 people from TA into settled homes** could result in a £14m social return on investment in Hounslow alone.

“While the overall impact is still emerging, initial benefits are evident in the structures that have been established. Notably, the templates offer a standardised framework that supports the development of robust business cases.

Ida Horner
Senior Housing Development and Supply
Officer, London Borough of Hounslow