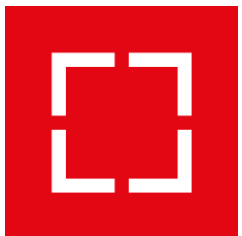




Small homes in England: problem or panacea?



NO
SPACE
LIKE
HOME

Professor Phil Hubbard, Urban Futures (KCL), with Katherine Brickell (KCL); Helen Carr (Southampton); Jon Reades (CASA, UCL); Eleanor Wilkinson (Sheffield); plus **Ruth Neville (UCL)**, Iliana Ortega Alcazar (Sheffield) and Ella Harris (KCL)

The growth in 'rabbit hutch' homes

NO
SPACE
LIKE
HOME



- Growth in smaller homes and especially 'micro-apartments' a noted phenomena in English cities
- Often related to drive to **verticalism** and increasing the **density** of cities (with reference to the '15 minute city' idea)



Arguments for 'shrinking' homes

NO
SPACE
LIKE
HOME



- Deliver affordable housing at pace
- Efficient/sufficient use of land and resource
- Energy-efficient – cheaper heating etc
- Demographic demand – more people living alone
- 'Digital nomad' discourse

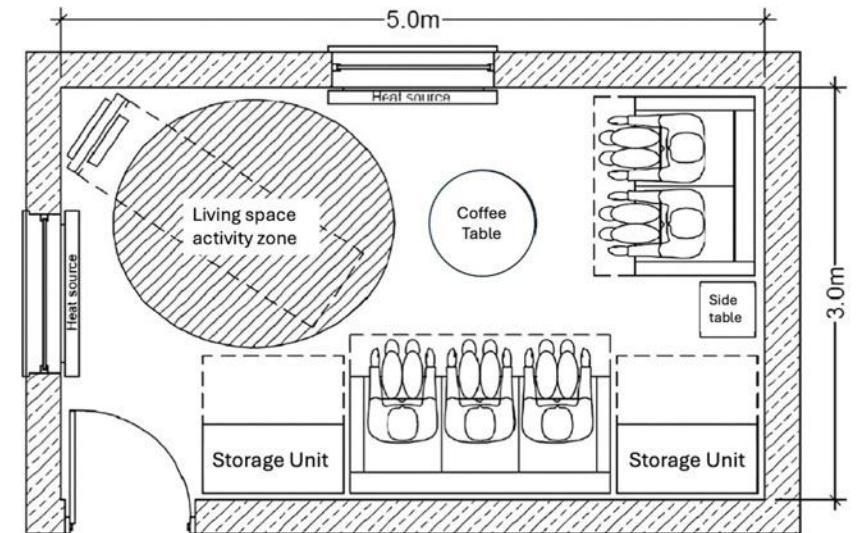


The role of space standards

NO
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- 1918 Homes for Heroes: Tudor Waters Act
- 1935 Housing Act
- 1961 Homes for Today and Tomorrow: Parker Morris
- 1977 GLC Preferred Dwelling Plans
- 1985 Housing Act
- 2005 Housing Quality Standards
- 2010 London Housing Design Guide
- 2015 Nationally Described Space Standards



NDSS (2015)

NO
SPACE
LIKE
HOME



- The NDSS states that a single bedroom should have a floor area of at least 7.5m² and be at least 2.15m wide.
- The **minimum gross internal area** is 37m² for a one-bed, one-person dwelling with a shower room, 61m² for 2b3p, and 70m² for 2b4p
- NDSS also stipulate minimum ceiling heights of 2.3 m for at least 75% of the habitable area of a flat, suggesting a conception of space that is **volumetric**

England



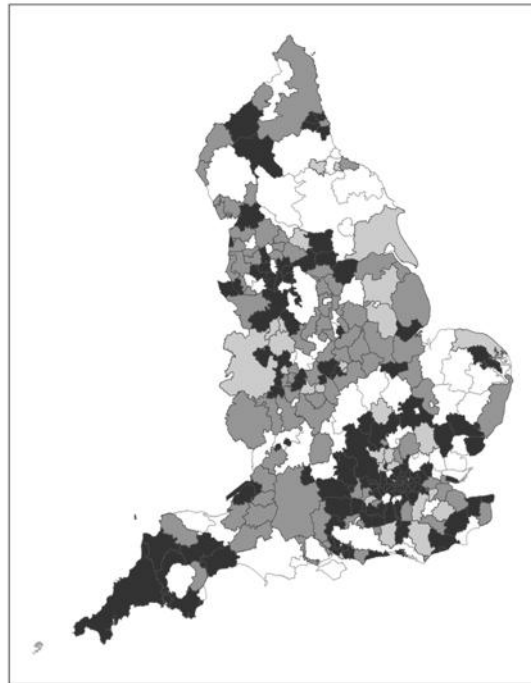
The uneven adoption of NDSS

NO
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LIKE
HOME



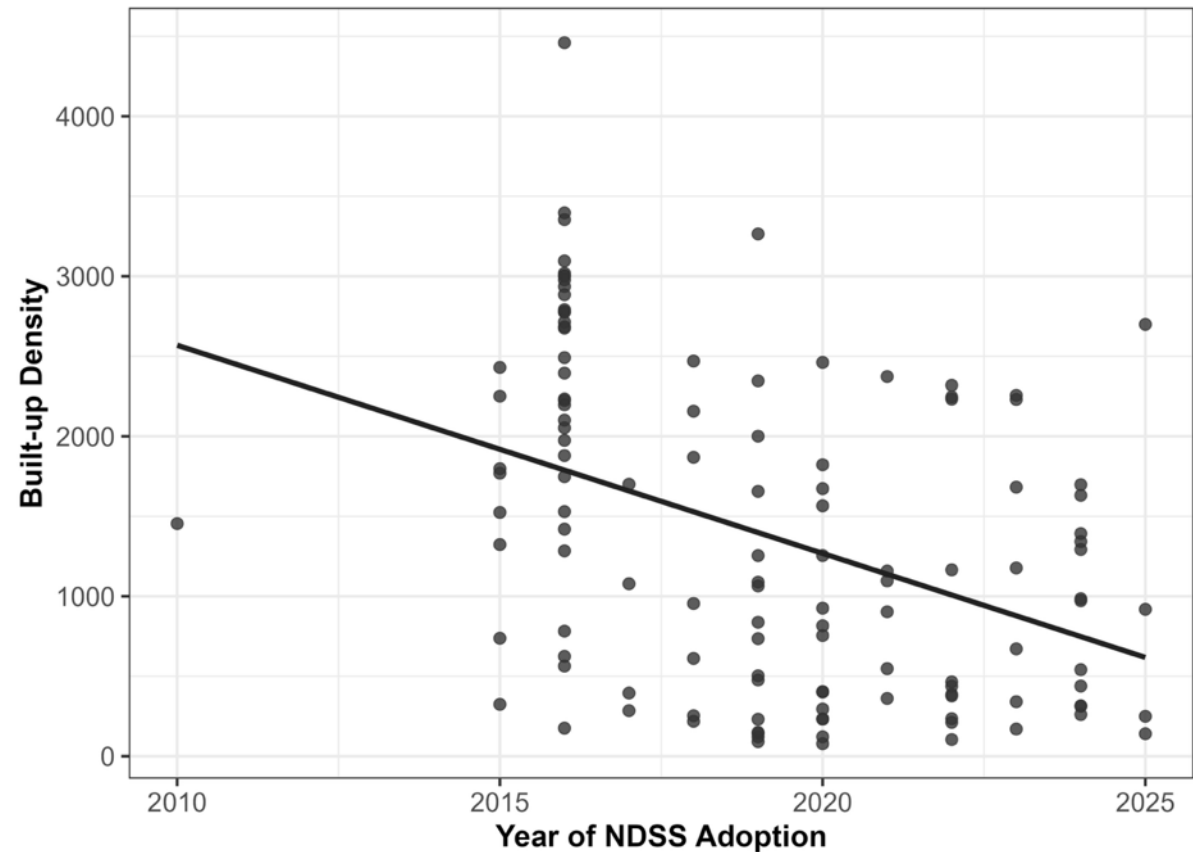
NDSS Adoption by Local Planning Authorities

Status as of 2025



Adoption Status ■ Adopted ■ Near Future ■ Not Adopted

Source: Adapted from Özer & Sam Jacoby 2023 by Authors
Dataset for 'Space standards in affordable housing in England' with updated data

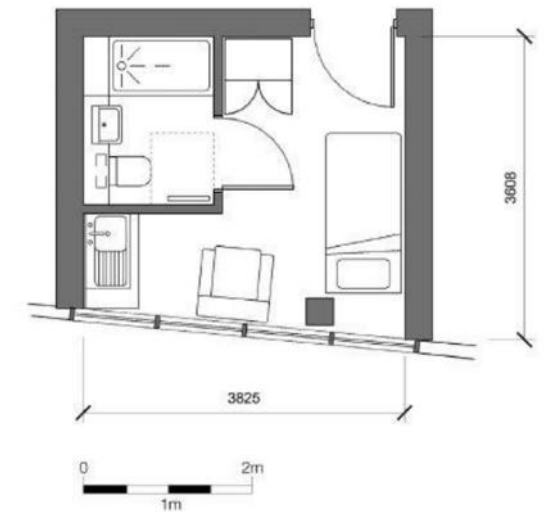


Permitted Development

NO
SPACE
LIKE
HOME



- PDR allowed conversion of shops, offices and warehouses to residential without any stipulation over home size
- c.73% of PDR 2013-2021 produced homes **below** the NDSS minimum
- The smallest offered studio units of 13-14m²



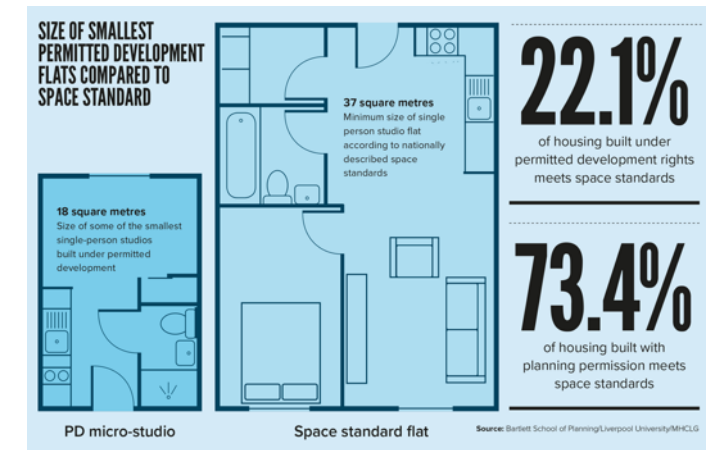
Newbury House single studio 13m²

Permitted Development

NO
SPACE
LIKE
HOME



- Survey of those living in PDR (n=218) showed common problems were a **shortage of space** (46%), **street noise** (40%), **noise from neighbours** (26%), **pollution** (16%), **vandalism / crime** (16%) and **lack of fresh air** (14%) (Clifford et al 2021)
- **Adding more space** was the most frequent response (n=20/41) to what interview participants would change: specific demands for larger kitchens (e.g. "the kettle is on a stool"), additional bedrooms and more storage (Pineo et al, 2024)

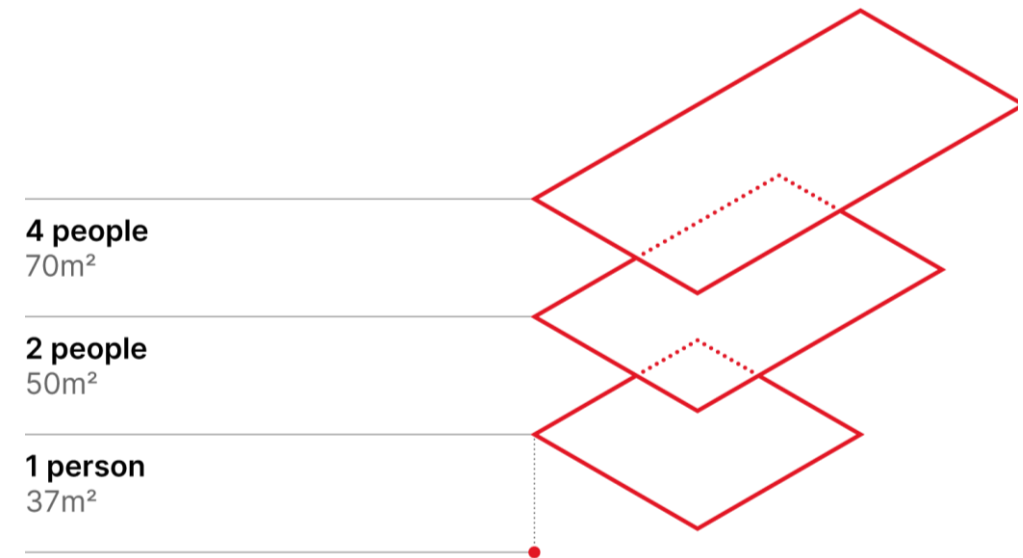


The data deficit

NO
SPACE
LIKE
HOME



- No appraisal of home size in since the introduction of the 2015 NDSS especially on the overall number, distribution, and cost of very small homes below the one-bed, one-person minimum (37m²).
- In part this is because of the lack of **readily-available, spatially-disaggregated** data and interrogation of small homes that are non-PDR



Research Questions

NO
SPACE
LIKE
HOME



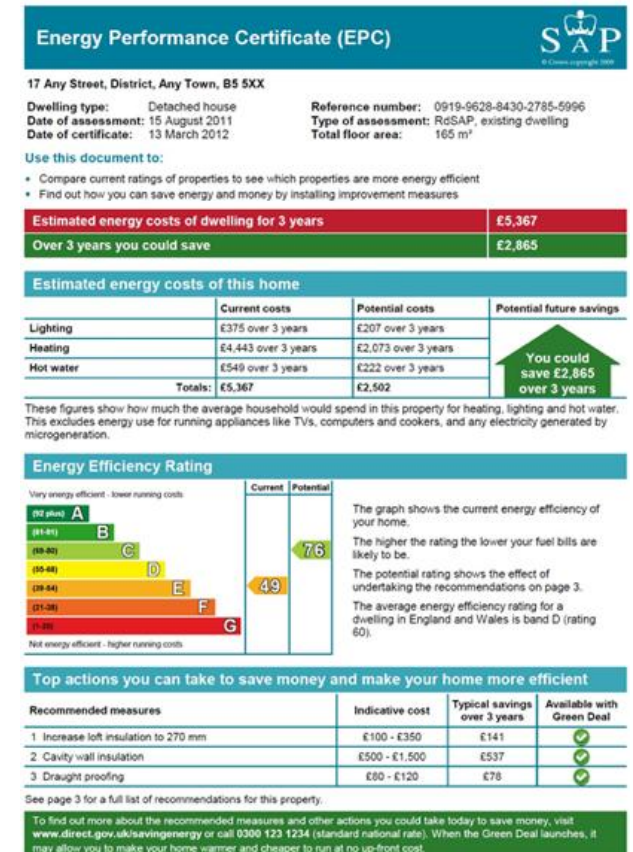
- RQ1: What form do these sub-sized domestic properties take?
- RQ2: In which neighbourhoods are these properties most numerous?
- RQ3: Does the development of small homes improve housing affordability, or, conversely, increase house prices and rental costs?
- RQ4: Do people living in these properties experience them as adequate and liveable homes?
- RQ5: What role does regulation play in these geographies? (and why are proportions of sub-sized homes higher in some local authorities than others?)

Mapping Small Properties

NO
SPACE
LIKE
HOME



- Working with 25m EPC certificates for England, to identify the very smallest **self-contained properties** < 37m²
- **Excludes:** HMOs, co-living, PBSA – all of which are immune from NDSS
- **Includes:** self-contained retirement properties, to which the NDSS theoretically applies (but which may be viewed in different way by developers, planners and occupants)
- Matching EPC floorspace data with Price Paid Data, Zoopla data, planning records etc

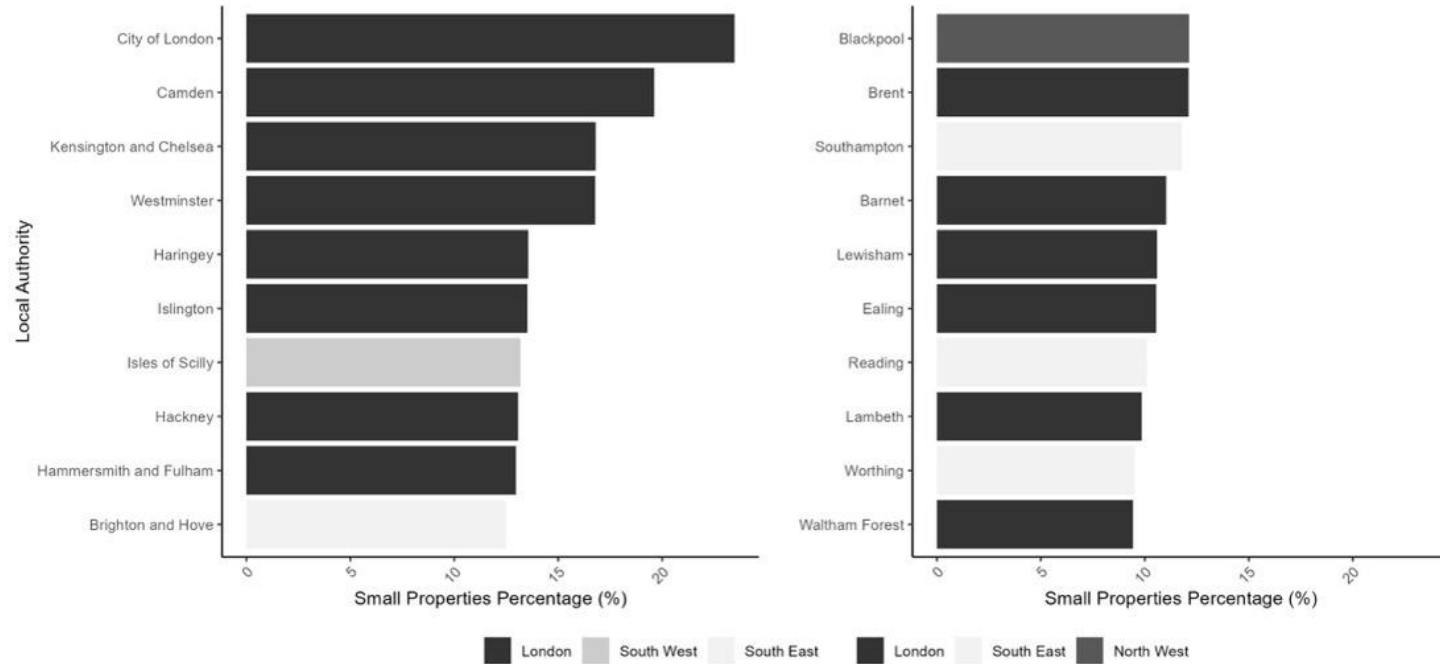


The National Picture

NO
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HOME



Top 20 Local Authorities by Small Properties Percentage



Small Properties by Local Authority (England & Wales)



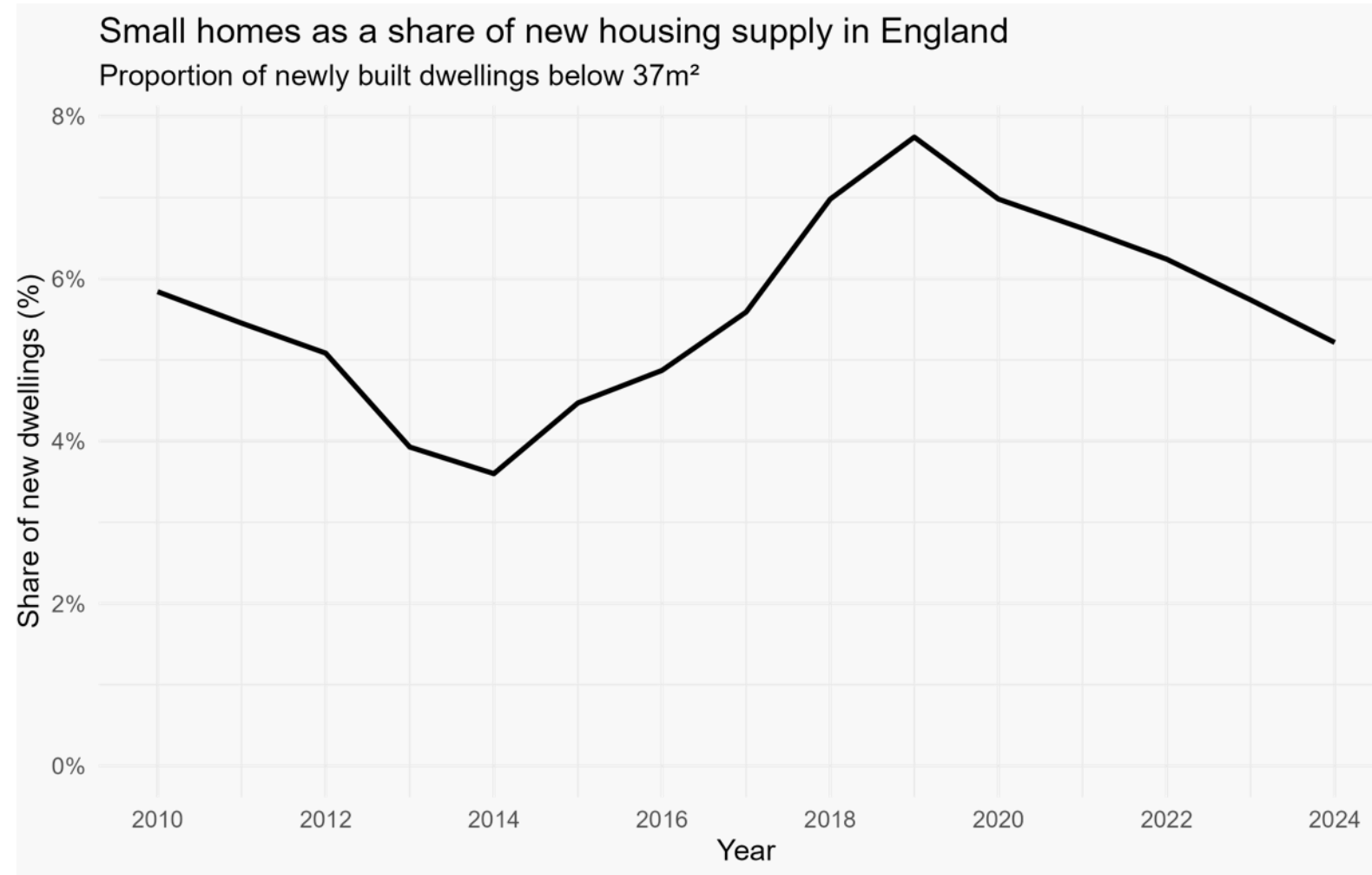
Interactive Map

NO
SPACE
LIKE
HOME



Changes over time

NO
SPACE
LIKE
HOME



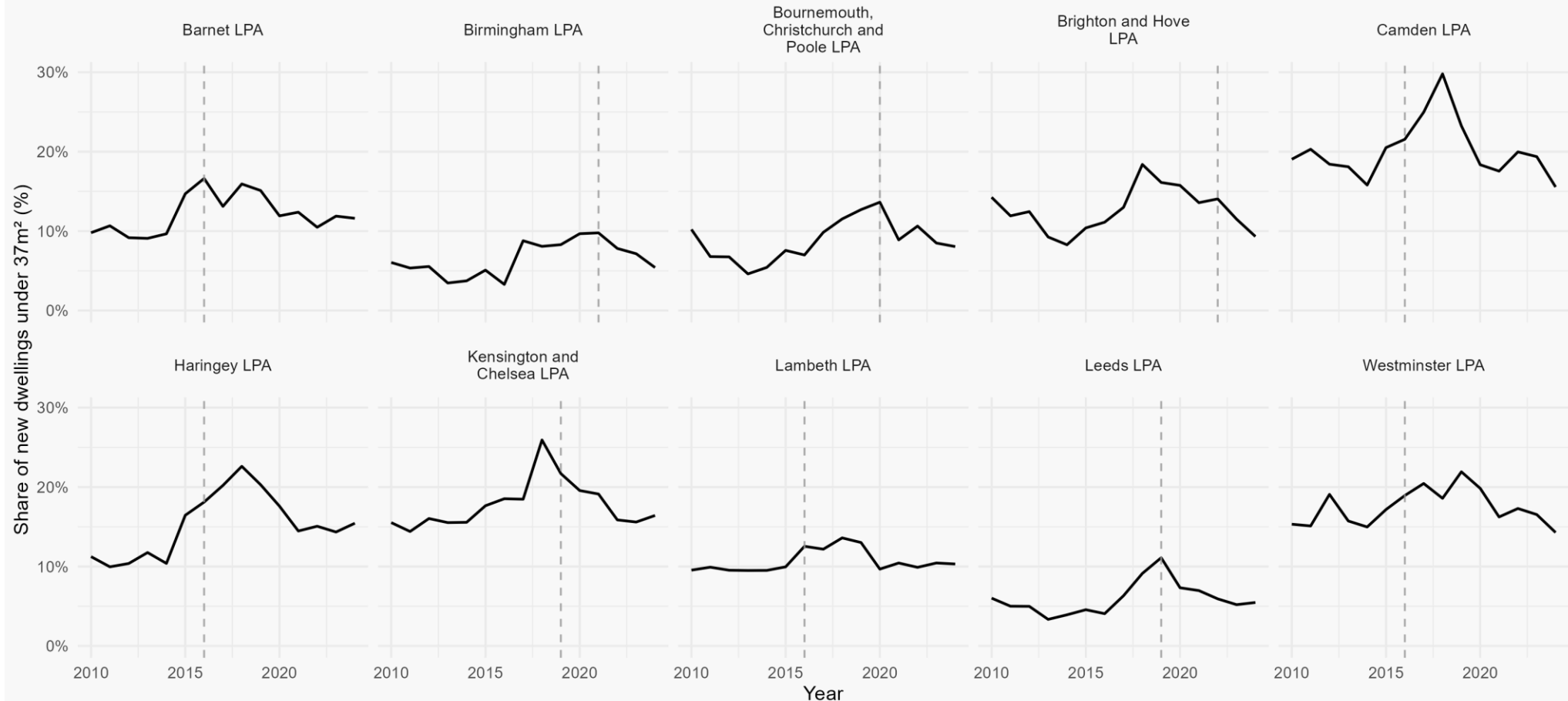
Changes over time

NO
SPACE
LIKE
HOME



Small new homes (<37m²) in the 10 highest-volume local authorities

Local trajectories over time; dashed line shows year of NDSS adoption (descriptive)



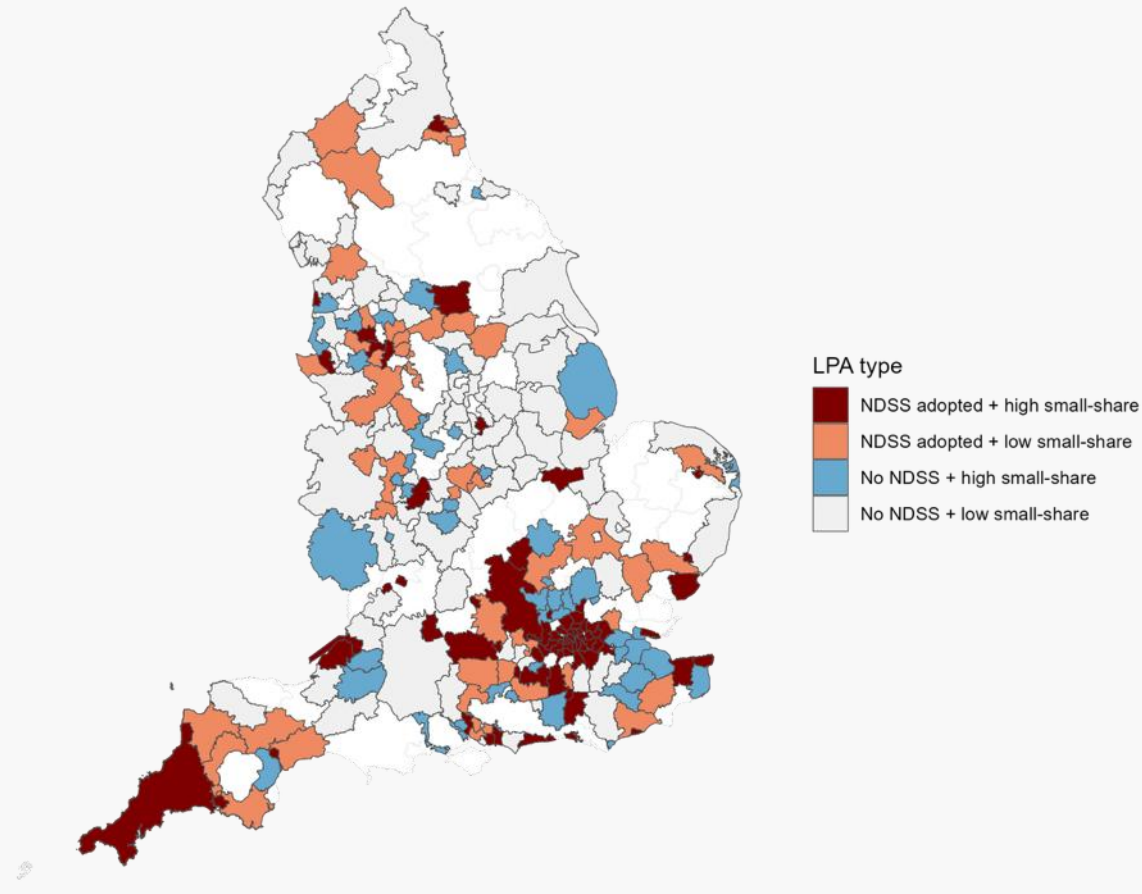
NDSS Adoption and Dwelling Size

NO
SPACE
LIKE
HOME



NDSS adoption and prevalence of very small dwellings (<37m²)

Bivariate classification: adoption status × mean small-dwelling share (descriptive)



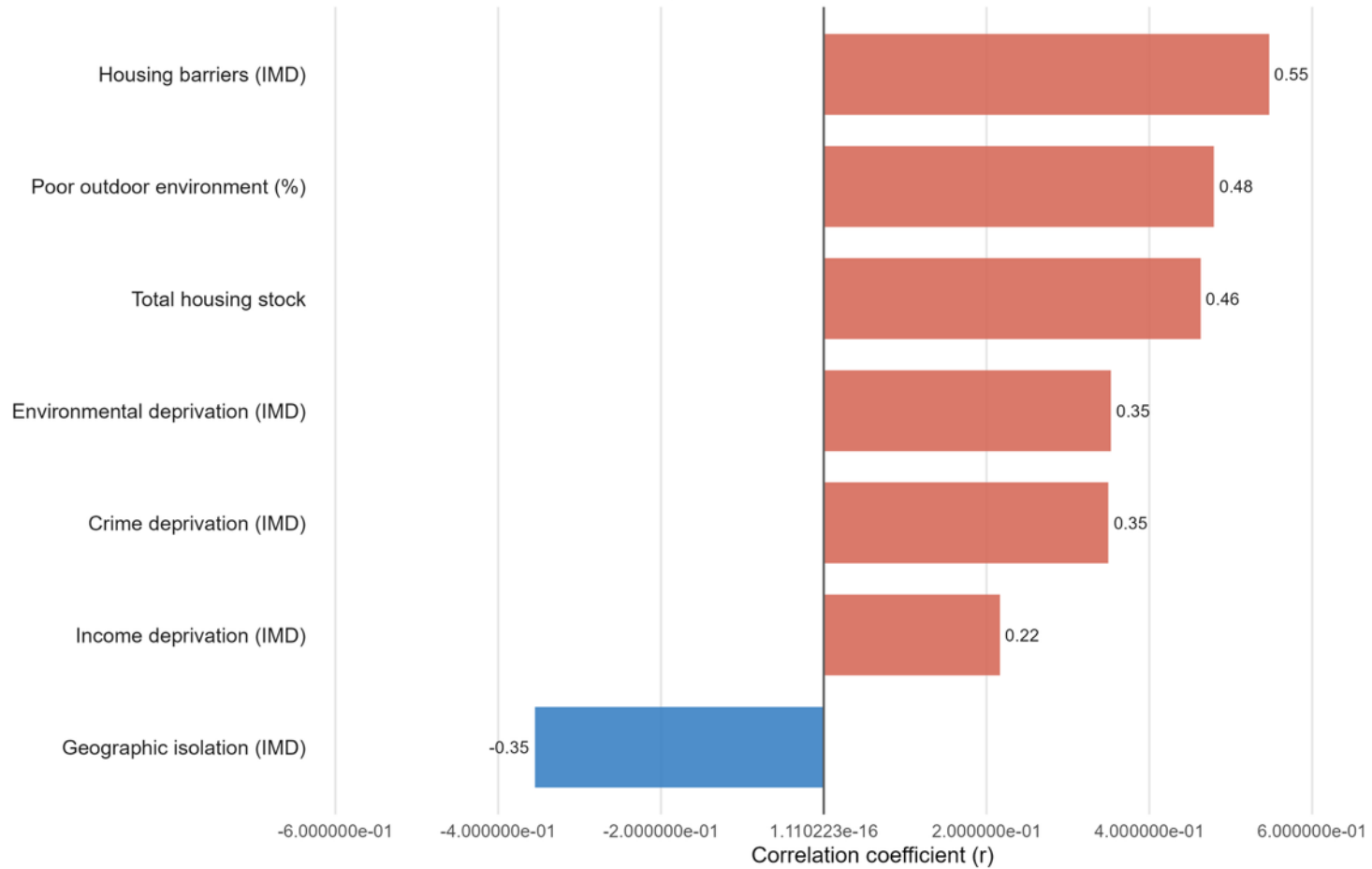
Neighbourhoods

NO
SPACE
LIKE
HOME



Neighbourhood correlates of small homes

MSOA-level correlations with share of homes <37m² (selected indicators)



Descriptive correlations only (not causal). Data: EPC + IMD (England).

Small properties in London

NO
SPACE
LIKE
HOME



Flats smaller than 37 sqm in and before 2008 1e6

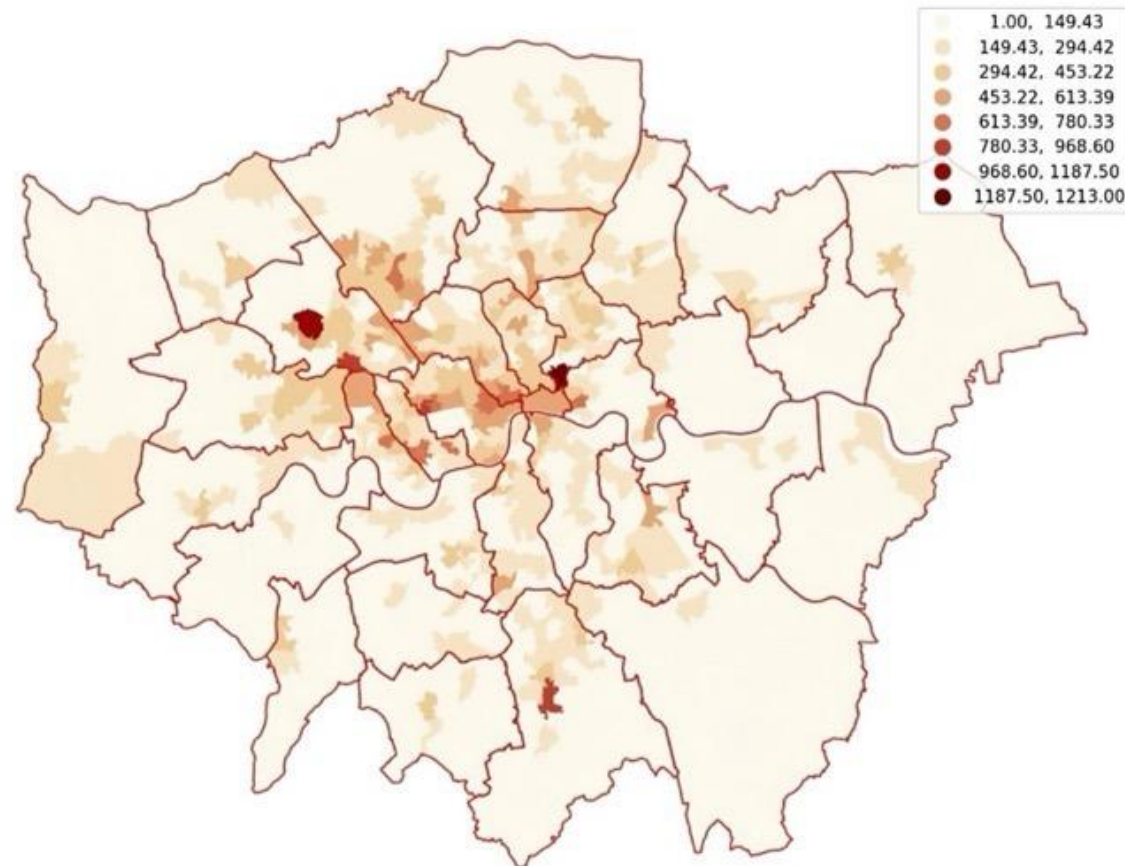


Small properties in London

NO
SPACE
LIKE
HOME

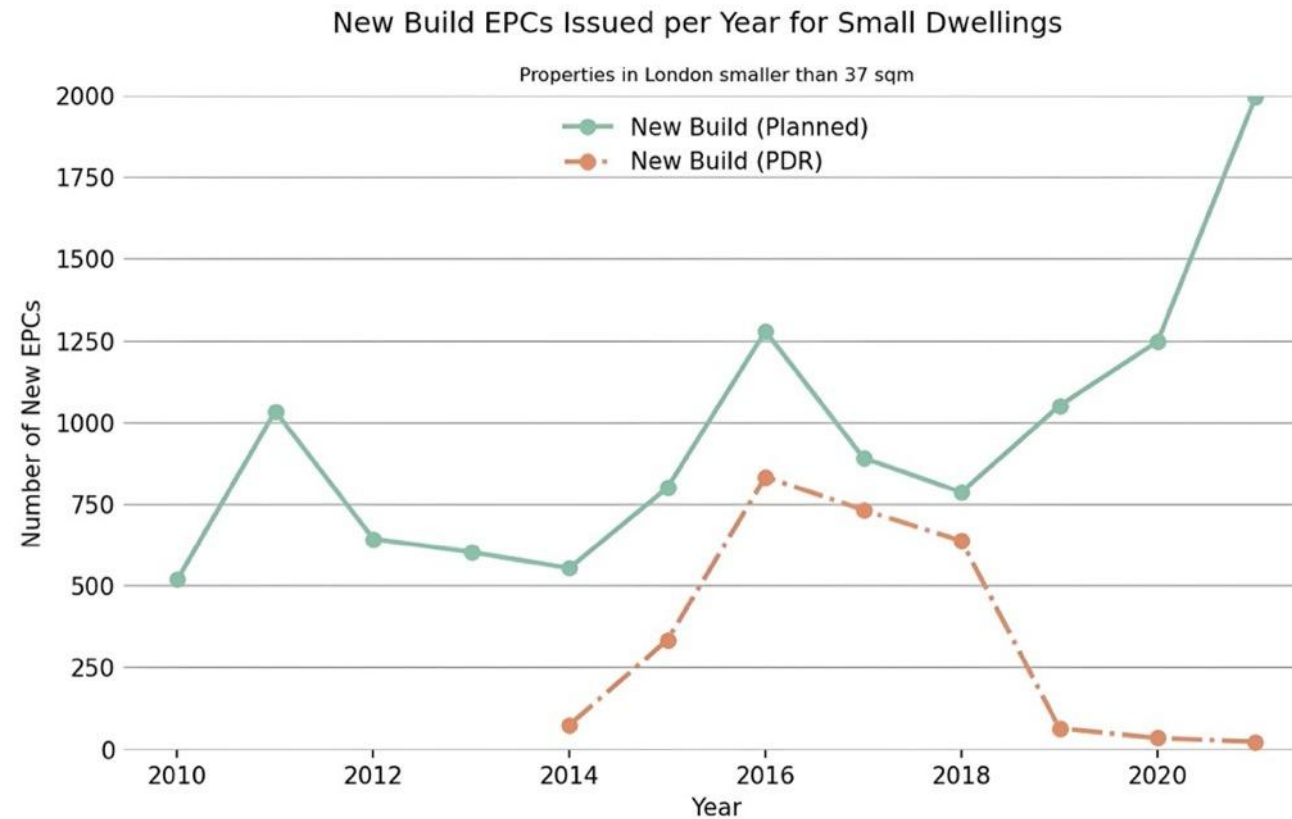


Count of EPC Small Dwellings Registrations by MSOA (2010-2021)



Small properties in London

NO
SPACE
LIKE
HOME

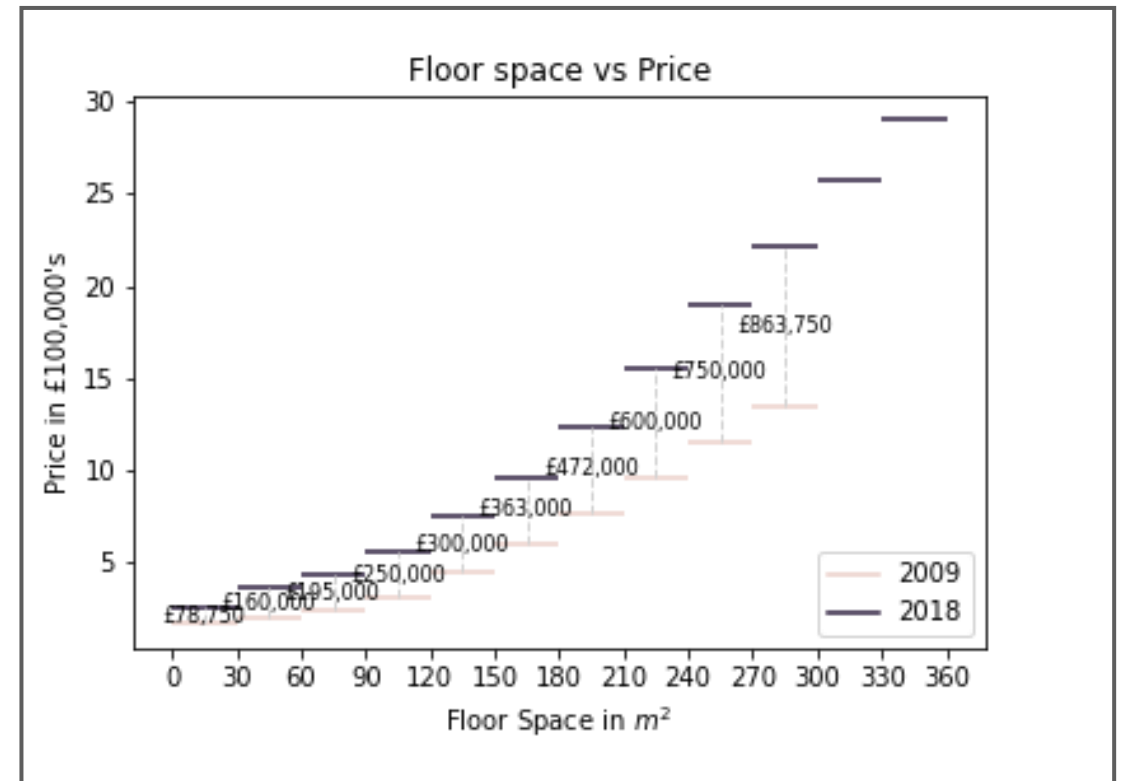


Small properties in London

NO
SPACE
LIKE
HOME



- More small homes could be beneficial if they create a pool of more affordable properties for those struggling to afford larger ones
- There are significantly more small homes in areas with higher rents (95% significance)
- But price per square metre figures suggests micro-homes are **as much per square metre as much, much larger properties**

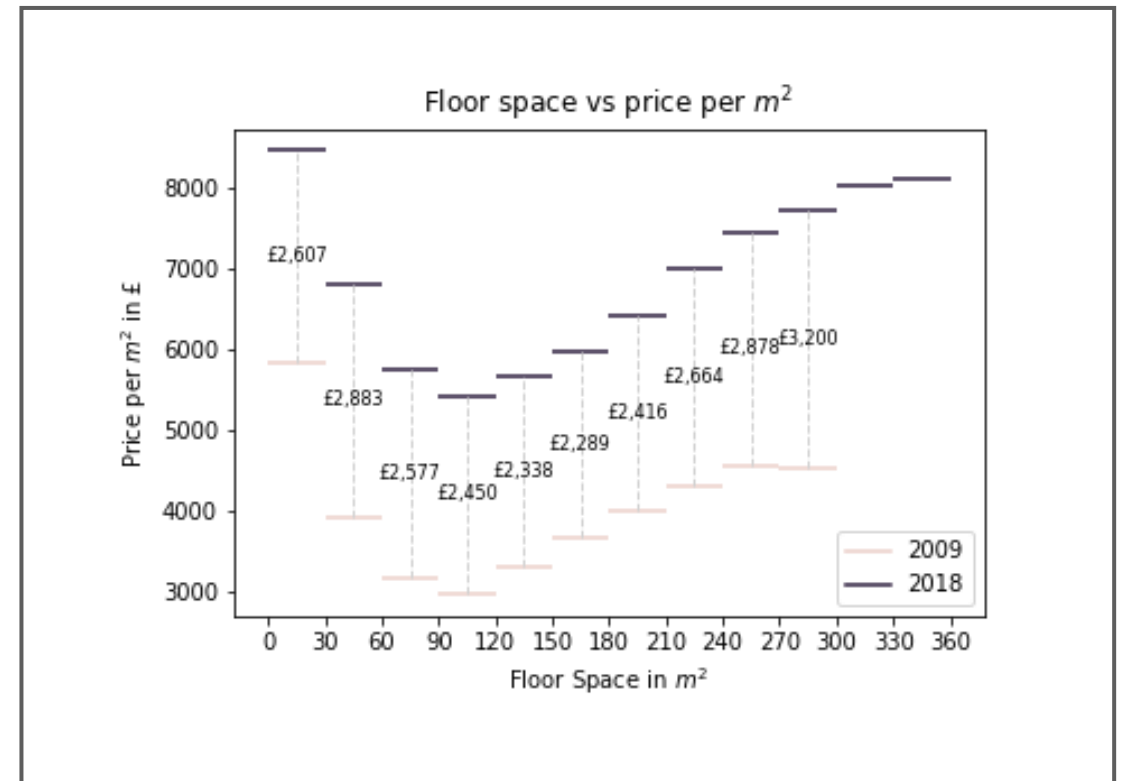


Small properties in London

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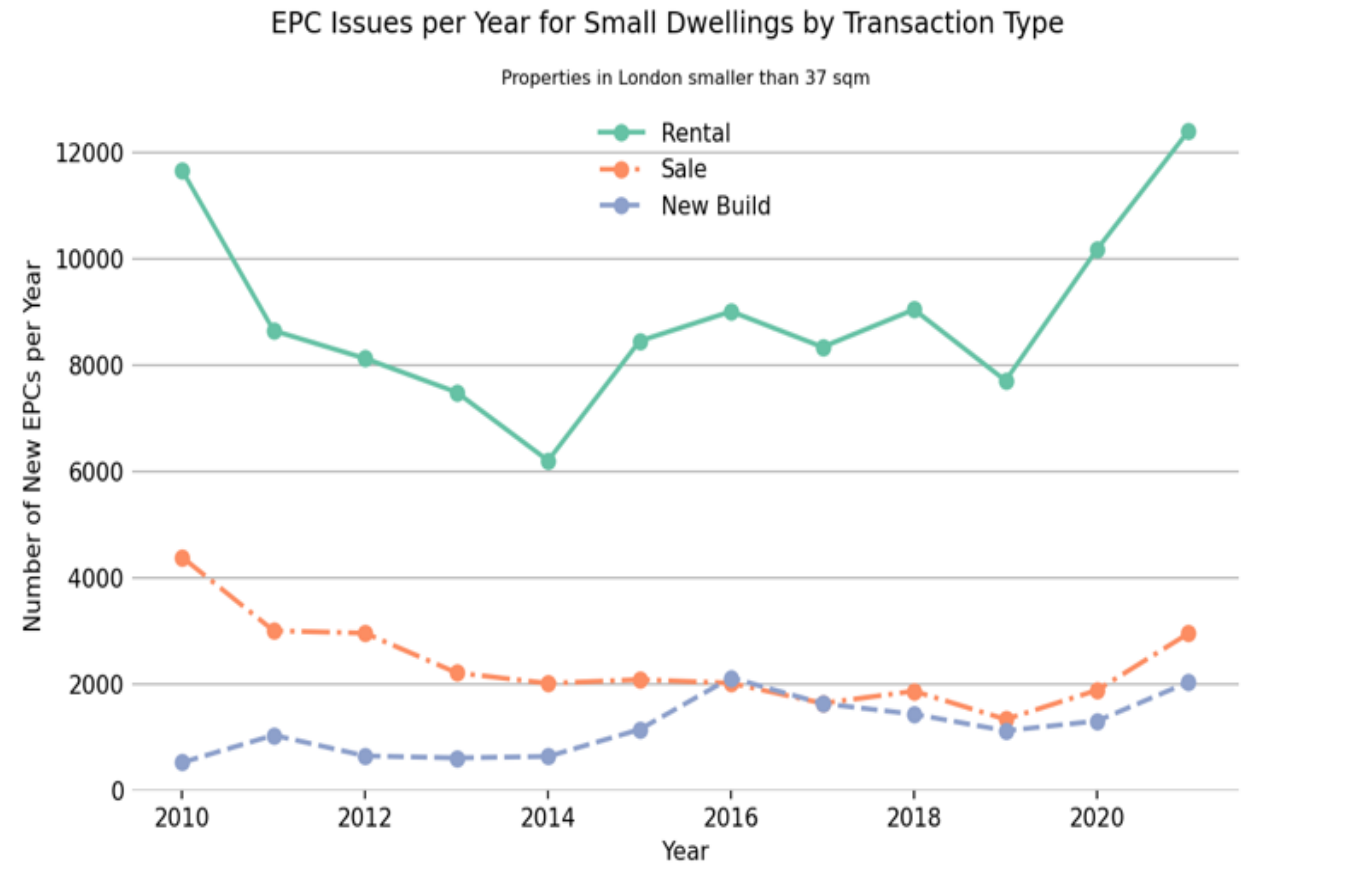


Small properties in London

NO
SPACE
LIKE
HOME



- 4.7% of all homes smaller than recommended minimum size in 2011, rising to 8% by 2021
- Most small domestic properties in London are still properties developed before 2010 but **very small new build properties increasing in number**



Diverse shrinking homes

NO
SPACE
LIKE
HOME



OLD ORDNANCE SURVEY
350 Romsey Road

SOUTHAMPTON UNIVERSITY
24,445 students

SOLENT UNIVERSITY
9650 students

SOUTHAMPTON CITY CENTRE
Masterplan area



Southampton (pop 256,100) EPC data <40m2 homes

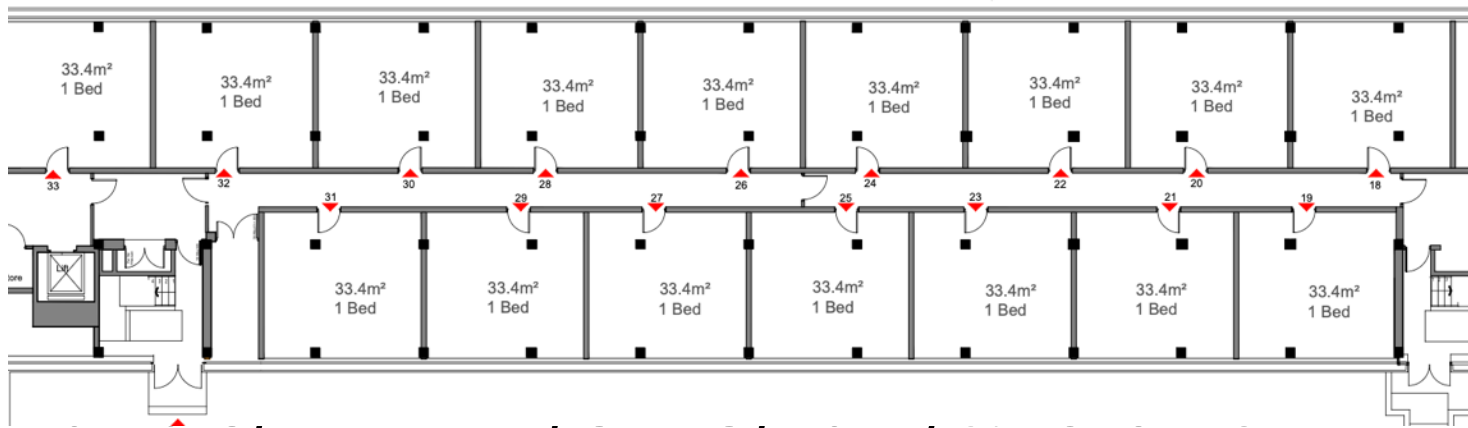
Diverse shrinking homes

NO
SPACE
LIKE
HOME



Compass House,
Southampton, Old
Ordnance Survey
Building,

223 single flats, 33m²
plus 18 double bed
flats, 2016 GDPO



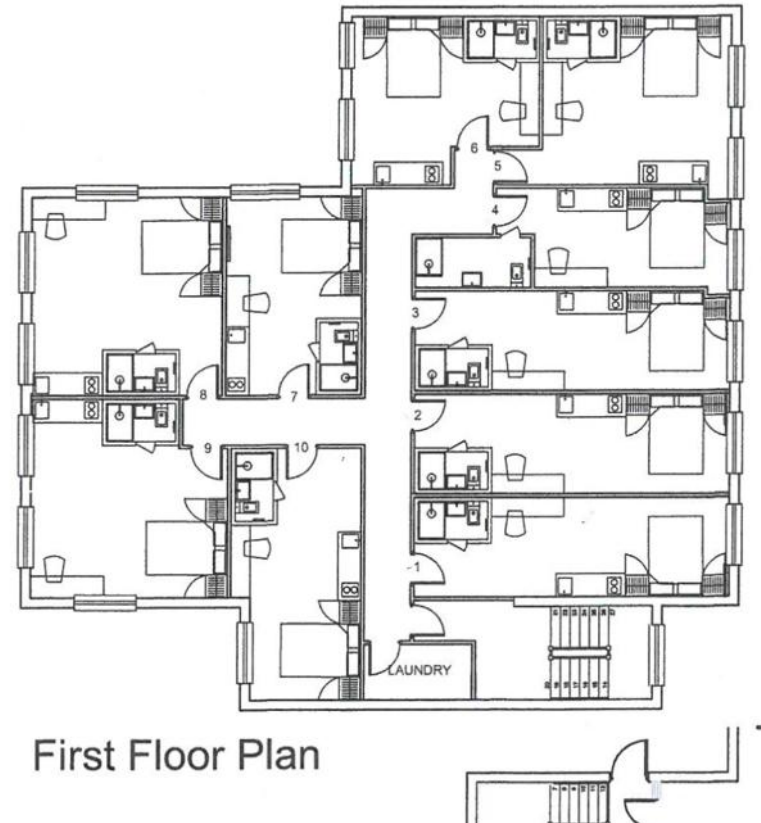
Nationally Described
Space Standard

Diverse shrinking homes?

NO
SPACE
LIKE
HOME



A first floor studio apartment for students/professionals is available at the heart of Southampton City centre in Bedford place. Close to pubs, restaurants, West Quay shopping centre, Solent university and Southampton Central train station. Tastefully furnished throughout this apartment is ideal for students who are wishing to experience a relaxed and secured home life after a stressful day at University.



First Floor Plan



Nationally Described
Space Standard

Andromeda House, Southampton, 20 Flats, 17-21 m2, GDPO, 2014, c. £825 month

Diverse shrinking homes?

NO
SPACE
LIKE
HOME



Nationally Described
Space Standard



106 Shirley Road, Southampton, 2013 (17/01722/PAC3), Flats 15-18m², GDPO

Diverse shrinking homes?

NO
SPACE
LIKE
HOME



Nationally Described
Space Standard

Castle Place, 117 High Street, Southampton, 2004
18 Flats between 30 and 36m², Full Permission

Amount of Development/Mix of Uses

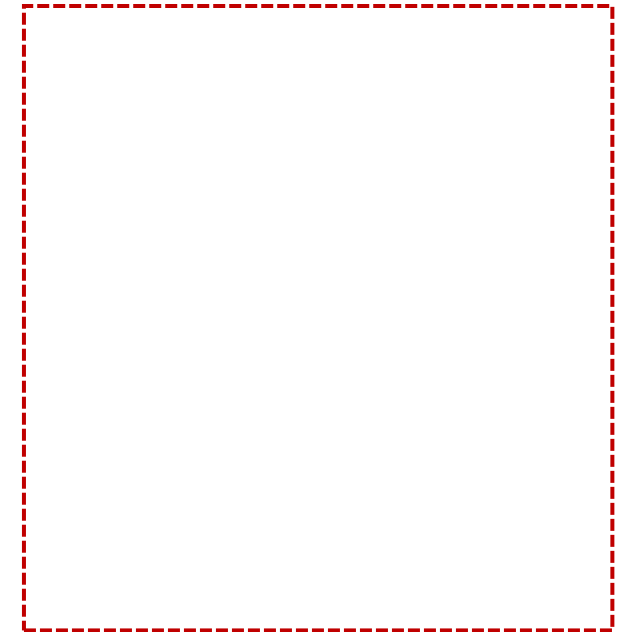
The proposal represents a high-density form of development which would make optimum use of this brownfield site. The proposed density, 226 dwellings per hectare, complies with Policy H12 of the Local Plan Review and the Old Town Development Strategy which sets a minimum density of 100 dwellings per hectare for new housing developments in this area. A range of dwelling sizes and types would be provided, a mix of one and two bedroom flats for sale as well as 30 'micro flats', which are effectively studio units. The development also incorporates sheltered

Diverse shrinking homes?

NO
SPACE
LIKE
HOME



Nationally Described
Space Standard

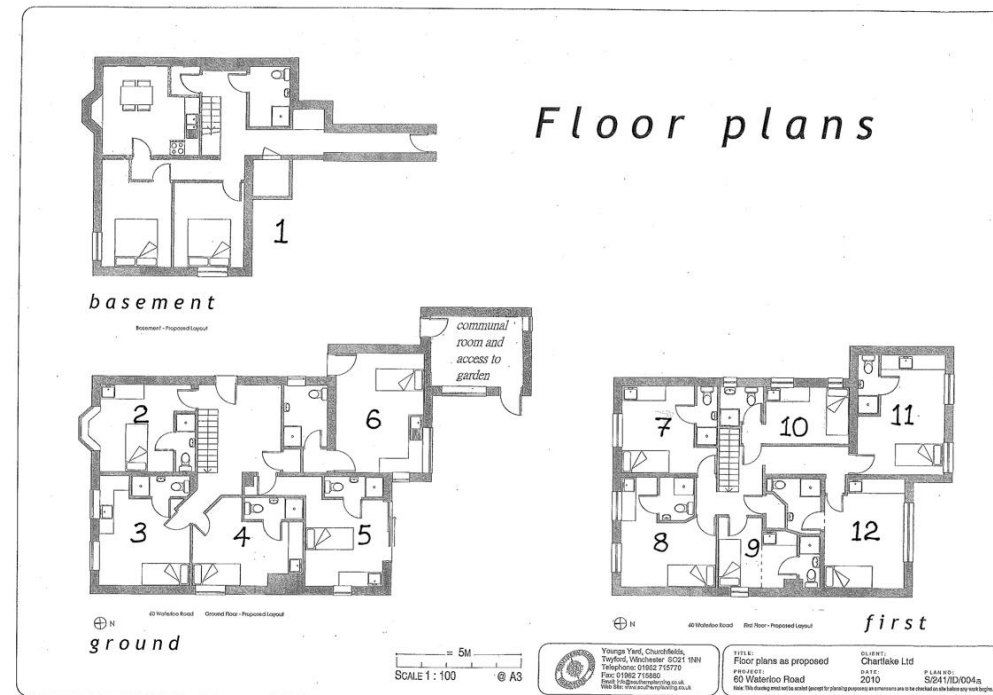


Bargate Quarter, Southampton, 607 new homes

Includes sub-standard flats, 2020 Full Approval under construction

Diverse shrinking homes?

NO
SPACE
LIKE
HOME



Nationally
Described
Space
Standard

60 Waterloo Road, Southampton
CLEUD, 2013, for 12 self-contained flats 12-25m²

Diverse shrinking homes?

NO
SPACE
LIKE
HOME



121-123 Northam Road, Southampton

Flats 11-22m² (conversion date unclear, change to bedsits refused 1997)

Diverse shrinking homes?

NO
SPACE
LIKE
HOME



- **Less than 1% of small homes are developments of 50+,** most contain 3-4 units (28%) or a pair (24%) with 11% 10-19 units
- **Apartments account for 56% of small housing developments,** house subdivisions 36%, retirement 7% BUT apartments 63% of units, house divisions 21% and retirement 13%
- 82% developments obtained Full Planning Permission, 6% GDPO, 5% CLEUD but 7% have **no planning permission**
- 50% of small homes have planning permission obtained since 1994 and **10% in last four years**

N = 1250 developments or 8420 units

Problems for occupants

NO
SPACE
LIKE
HOME



Kearns (2022) suggests problems including:

- Poor mental health / claustrophobia
- Lack of workspace
- Restricted exercise space
- Limited cooking surfaces
- Poor thermal comfort
- No storage space for possessions
- Inability to bulk buy/economise
- Lack of space for socialising



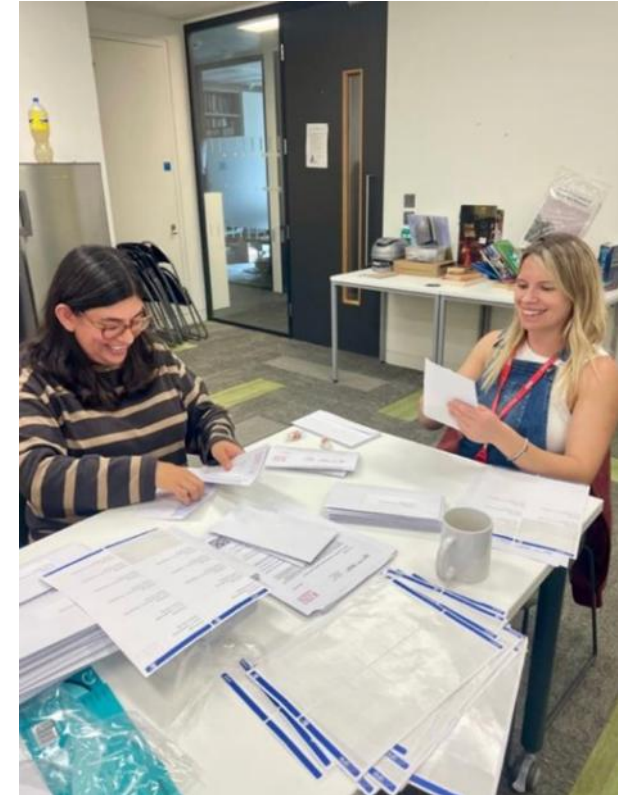
Problems for occupants

NO
SPACE
LIKE
HOME



Our interviews to date suggest:

- Shame/stigma
- Thwarted life-courses
- 'Cabin fever'
- Sockets and storage
- BUT: Small space as sanctuary

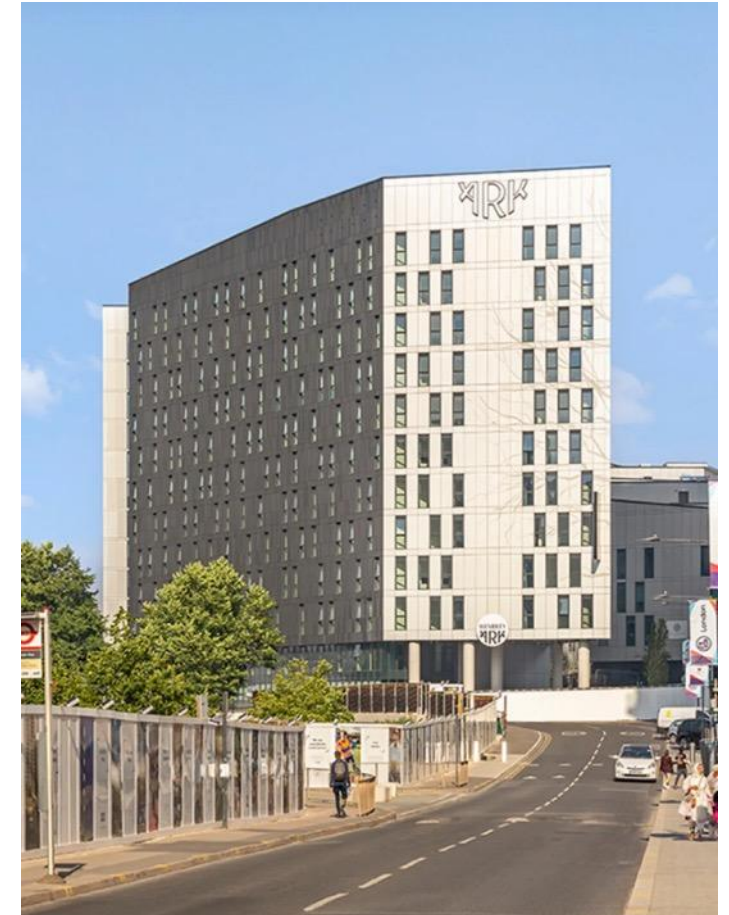


Limitations?

NO
SPACE
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HOME



- **Co-living** – not included. NDSS does not apply (but some LPAs have guidelines for Large-scale Purpose-Built Shared Developments c. 25m²)
- **Student housing** – generally not included (guidelines for studio c.18m²)
- **Retirement or sheltered housing** – included if self-contained
- **Temporary housing or shelters** – included if self-contained
- **HMOs** – not included, but assumed to have worst housing standards



Policy recommendations

NO
SPACE
LIKE
HOME



- **Adoption of NDSS** to maintain decent standards: those local authorities which have not adopted have less control over space standards (and are more likely to lose Appeal Cases).
- **Standardisation and coordination** of space standards across the NDSS, Housing Act 2004 (HMO sector), and LPA guidelines for purpose-built student and co-living developments.
- **Enforcement of space standards** important especially – but not only - in the PRS
- **Scrutiny of assumptions** that all people need – or deserve – less space at the beginning and end of life
- **Adaptability of homes** as households grow or shrink would prevent residential churn and be environmentally beneficial

References

NO
SPACE
LIKE
HOME



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