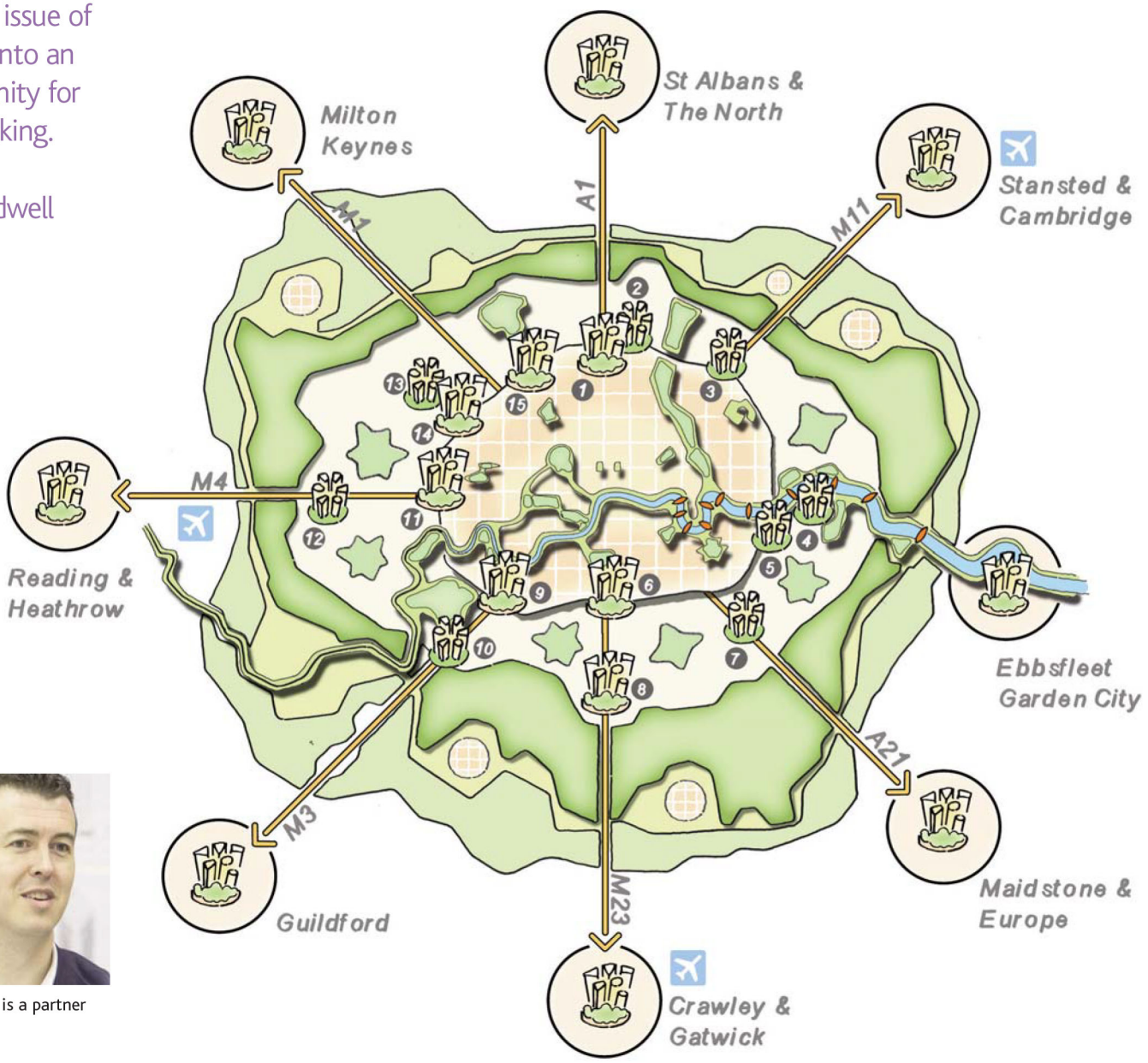
London's future, considered today

Growth is happening – it is something we can't avoid. But we can plan for it, and with long term, proactive planning, we can turn the issue of growth into an opportunity for placemaking. says Nigel Bidwell

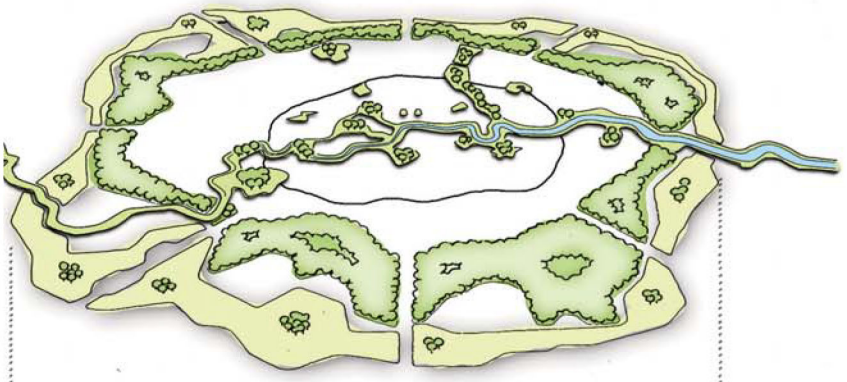
London's population now stands at 8.6million, the largest it has ever been since its peak in 1939. With the predicted growth expected to reach 10million in just over 10 years, we need to find a clear approach for the provision of new homes in the city. We need to think carefully about how we do this, and how it affects not only London, but also the areas surrounding it.

At MIPIM earlier this year, Terry published his Vision for London – a plan for a greener, better connected city. This vision reshapes the debate, and presents some new proposals for the future of London. The multi-layered approach brings together four main ideas: make London a National Park City; intensify the core; create new town centres around transport hubs; and stitch together east London with low-level bridges.

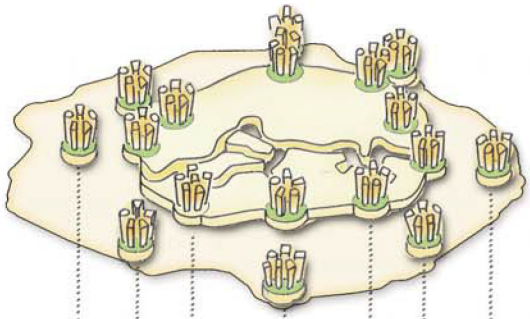
In the past 5 years London has grown equivalently to adding the size of Edinburgh, and in the next 10 years it will be adding the equivalent of Birmingham. However, while London is growing in population, the perception of the city is that it is shrinking. With improved transport links, it is now much faster to get from place to place, either within London or commuting from outside the city. This idea of changing perceptions is fundamental to Farrells' vision. If we stop thinking of London's core as bound by the circle line, and see the opportunity of new >>>



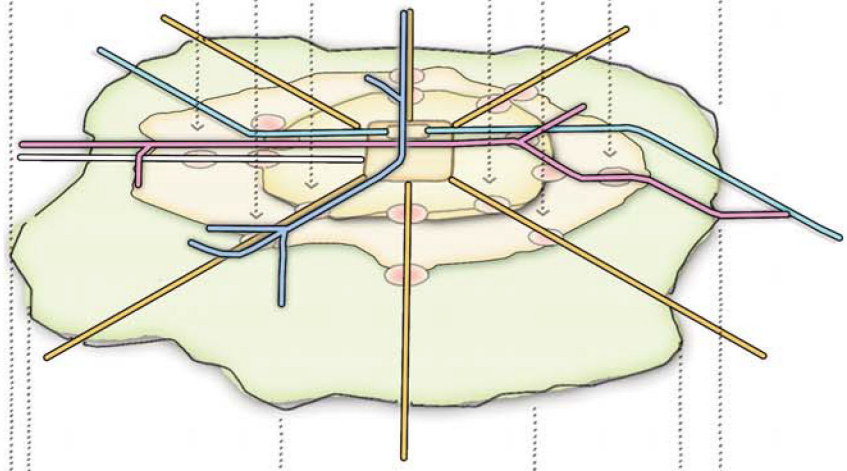
Nigel Bidwell is a partner at Farrells



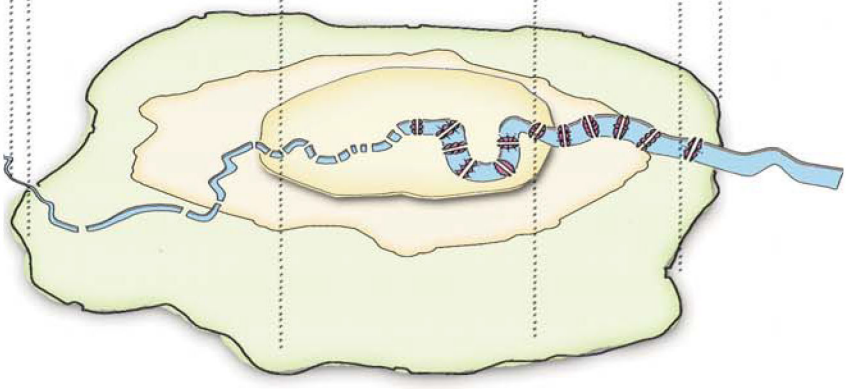
1 – Make London a national park city



2 – Intensify the core



3 – Create new town centres around transport hubs



4 – Stitch together east London with low-level bridges

town centres in the fringe areas of London, we start to see a lot more opportunities for growth. Highly connected town centres on the current fringe will be seen to be just as 'core' as the centre – areas such as Croydon, Old Oak Common, Ilford and Meridian Water.

And it is not just about creating new homes - it is also about creating a sense of place. Emerging town centres need to be accompanied by the appropriate infrastructure. Infrastructure supports high density places, and leads to increased footfall. This in turn creates more animated places, which are safer and more enjoyable to be in.

Intensification goes hand in hand with improved quality of life. We need to ensure that we better connect communities to their green spaces by making London the world's first 'national park city'. The Greater London National Park campaign, led by Daniel Raven-Ellison, calls for recognition of the value of London as a national park city, which has an astonishing 47% green space and over 13,000 species of wildlife. Recognising the green spaces throughout the whole of London, and actively connecting communities to these spaces, will help us to value the areas around the current fringes of the city and encourage these places to emerge as new town centres. It will also help us to protect London's quality of life – a key consideration when planning for intensification, and something that could easily get overlooked in a rush to accommodate growth.

The Thames is a key element in this proposal, and of course something we can't ignore when it comes to London. Connecting communities across the river will allow East London to develop in the same way that Central and West London has done already, and help the area reach its full potential and become truly urban. Farrells' vision for London proposes 12 low level bridges that can connect pedestrians to activities both sides of the river, and open up development opportunities for East London.

Connecting what were previously considered fringe areas to the now expanded core with improved infrastructure and links to amenities along these routes, new and existing town centres will be better connected and therefore be able to accommodate the needs of inhabitants.

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