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Council on Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat Aims to Understand and Address the Global Density Dilemma

City of London & Paris La Défense leaders join international forum on adaptive reuse, sustainability & well-being

Chicago—The [Council on Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat \(CTBUH\)](#) announced today its aim to examine and address the impact of burgeoning urban density, a widespread and multifaceted global issue that requires innovative approaches in architecture, urban planning, public policy and numerous other fields, at its [annual international conference](#), September 23–27, in London and Paris, themed “New or Renew: Addressing the Density Dilemma.”

But what is the density dilemma? As populations swell in cities worldwide—the United Nations projects that nearly 70% of the world’s population will live in urban areas by 2050—there is a growing need to actively confront the challenges of accommodating more people without compromising the environment; professional, civic and social engagement; and equitable and healthy living.

“Density can be perceived in various ways,” explained [CTBUH CEO Javier Quintana de Uña](#). “For some, it conjures challenges associated with big cities and insufficient infrastructure. For others, it represents smarter tall buildings, efficient land use, vibrant urban environments and the potential for sustainable living. We believe in the latter perception, which can meaningfully influence urban policies and development strategies—that’s why it’s essential to clarify what balanced, effective and livable density looks like.”

High-density urban areas offer several benefits. They can reduce the per capita cost of infrastructure and public services and support a diverse array of cultural and economic activities. Dense urban environments can also encourage public transportation use, reduce car dependency and lower greenhouse gas emissions, contributing to the fight against climate change.

However, these benefits are only realized when density is managed effectively, which requires imaginative solutions tailored to diverse urban contexts. To this end, more than 1,300 of today’s industry-leading experts, representing a wide range of disciplines and specializations, will convene in two densely populated capital cities to deliver and participate in hundreds of workshops, presentations, panel discussions and off-site tours that aim to determine the future of density (the full range of conference programming can be found [here](#)).

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One critical aspect of the density dilemma to be addressed at the CTBUH international conference is the revitalization of existing structures and urban areas. Adaptive reuse of old buildings and infrastructure can preserve cultural heritage while meeting modern needs, an approach that can be more sustainable than new construction by reducing the environmental impact associated with demolition and building materials.

As Gwyn Richards, Planning and Development Director at the City of London Corporation, stated, "Repurposing and retrofitting existing buildings is a key part of creating a pathway to sustainable urban regeneration. The theme of this year's CTBUH conference—new or renew—resonates deeply with our work in the City of London, where we advocate a 'retrofit first not retrofit only' approach and strive to balance heritage and modernity while creating vibrant, resilient and inclusive buildings and spaces for future generations."

Richards will engage in the [CTBUH City Advocacy Forum](#) (see description below), part of the event's opening plenary session, on Tuesday, September 24.

Sustainability, too, resides at the heart of the density dilemma. High-density developments must incorporate green building practices, non-polluting technologies and renewable energy sources to minimize their environmental footprint. Urban green spaces, such as parks and vegetated roofs, can mitigate the heat island effect, improve air quality and provide residents with areas for recreation and relaxation.

"Paris La Défense exemplifies sustainability through its inventive urban planning and architecture," according to Pierre-Yves Guice, CEO of Paris La Défense. "The district integrates eco-friendly technologies and initiatives, such as green roofs, energy-efficient buildings and extensive public transport networks, to minimize its carbon footprint and provide a model for balancing urban density with environmental responsibility."

Guice will present [Rejuvenation as Catalyst in Business District Development](#) on Wednesday, September 25.

Another primary challenge in addressing the density dilemma is balancing the need for more housing and infrastructure with the imperative to maintain or improve residents' quality of life. Poorly planned cities can lead to overcrowding, strained infrastructure and diminished public spaces.

"Addressing the density dilemma is about crafting communities. We must ensure that high-density developments foster livable, people-oriented communities that offer a high quality of life," expressed William Chilton, Principal at Pickard Chilton Architects. "Thoughtful urban and architectural design must turn the challenges of dense environments into opportunities for placemaking innovation. By embracing context, scale and purpose, we can create spaces that enhance the livability and connectivity of our cities."

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Chilton's [*A Tale of Three Cities: Balancing Context, Scale and Placemaking*](#) presentation will take place on Tuesday, September 24.

Beyond interconnectivity, we must also enhance the malleability of communities to support healthy and sustainable high-density living. According to Catherine Skinner, Principal at BVN, "Considering our cities as interconnected communities creates space for diversity, wonder and delight; places where continuous adaptation at both the individual and city scale is possible. This mindset uncovers possibilities beyond the immediately apparent and presents boundless opportunities for what our future might enable."

Skinner will share many of these opportunities with BVN Principal Matthew Blair in the "[Cities + Urban](#)" track on Wednesday, 25 September.

"When confronting the 'density dilemma,' we must not overlook how technological advancements are shaping the future," explained Gita Maruthayanar, Associate Director at Atelier Ten. "Innovations such as smart buildings that utilize data-driven design and automated services, modular construction methods and creative ways to lock in existing embodied carbon by reusing the structure are helping the industry reduce its carbon footprint. To accelerate the drive to net zero in dense urban environments, we need to minimize the need for new buildings and assess how existing buildings can be modified to be more sustainable, habitable and affordable."

Atelier Ten will participate in the panel discussion [*ESG and the Built Environment—the Elephant\(s\) in the Room*](#) on Tuesday, September 24.

Join the Dialogue, Address the Dilemma:

These and a myriad of other livable density opportunities will be considered and cultivated at the CTBUH 2024 international conference, a call to action for all stakeholders in urban development. By bringing together the brightest minds and most innovative thinkers, CTBUH aims to forge a path toward urban environments that are sustainable, equitable and resilient.

For more information on the CTBUH 2024 international conference, including the full list of speakers, sessions and registration details, please visit ctbuhconference.com. To request additional details, arrange to attend the conference as a member of the media or schedule interviews with experts, please contact CTBUH Marketing and Communications Director Charles Mutscheller at cmutscheller@ctbuh.org.

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Council on Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat

The Council on Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat (CTBUH) is a global nonprofit organization dedicated to smarter, more sustainable cities and a more viable future for global populations. Specifically, CTBUH focuses on the critical role of density in addressing climate change. CTBUH is headquartered in Chicago and has offices in Shanghai, China, and Venice, Italy. CTBUH's worldwide membership network includes companies from fields such as real estate development, architecture, engineering, cost consulting, building management and construction, among others. In addition to hosting leading industry events, CTBUH produces research and reporting on issues of significant consequence to its membership. Its most utilized asset is its building database, a compendium of detailed data, images and technical information on more than 40,000 tall buildings throughout the world. CTBUH is best known to the public as the arbiter of tall building height and the global authority that bestows titles such as "The World's Tallest Building." For more information, please visit ctbuh.org.

CTBUH City Advocacy Forum

In response to the global challenges of rapid urbanization, CTBUH has launched the City Advocacy Forum, a new initiative dedicated to advancing sustainable, resilient and inclusive high-density urbanism. Comprising an international network of industry-leading experts, including architects, urban planners, developers, policymakers and others, CTBUH and its members are uniquely positioned to foster critical dialogue and drive forward solutions that shape the future of our cities. The City Advocacy Forum aims to be a collaborative roundtable, where innovative ideas and policy recommendations are shared to support urban environments that thrive socially, economically and environmentally. To learn more, visit [CTBUH City Advocacy Forum](#).

City of London Corporation

The City of London Corporation is the governing body of the Square Mile dedicated to a vibrant and thriving city, supporting a diverse and sustainable London within a globally successful UK. The Square Mile is the financial district of London and the ancient core from which the rest of London developed, as well as a center for settlement, trade, commerce and ceremony since the Roman period, producing a unique historic environment of exceptional richness and significance.

Paris La Défense

Paris La Défense is a local public body responsible for public development, operations, animation and promotion of the district. Paris La Défense teams work to develop and modernize the area by implementing ambitious real estate and urban planning projects. Paris La Défense is embarking on a path consistent with these new social, civic and environmental requirements. Through its "raison d'être," the public body seeks to embody a carbon-free future for the district and has committed to halving its greenhouse gas emissions by 2030.

Paris La Défense represents:

- Paris La Défense ranked as the fourth best business district in the world, according to the EY-ULI 2020 business district attractiveness survey
- 180,000 employees, 50,000 residents, 70,000 students
- 3.8 million square meters (38 million square feet) of office space in more than 125 buildings
- 500 companies, including one-third of the CAC40 companies (French stock exchange)
- An area of 564 hectares, of which 31 hectares are pedestrian spaces, and more than 50 contemporary artworks

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