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# The resilience of a London Great Estate: urban development, adaptive capacity and the politics of stewardship

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## ABSTRACT

This paper explores the concept of resilience through the planning, development and management history of one of London's Great Estates. The Grosvenor Estate in Mayfair and Belgravia was developed incrementally from the 1720s and continues to be managed on behalf of the aristocratic Grosvenor family. The Great Estates have been described as exemplars of resiliently managed evolution in response to change in several publications and resilience acquired a strategic significance for Grosvenor in the early twenty-first century. This occurred in the context of the phenomenon of empty homes acquired by overseas investors which has steadily transformed the character of inner London areas, but also related to Grosvenor's management future. The paper argues that the Grosvenor Estate provides an intriguing case for testing academic ideas of "evolutionary resilience" while also raising issues of how resilience concepts are mobilised within the socio-political worlds of planning, development and real estate management practice.

## KEYWORDS

Resilience; adaptive capacity; London; Great Estates; Grosvenor

## Introduction

Academic research on urban resilience has often concentrated on how urban systems deal with and recover from specific hazards, crises or disasters (for example, Mileti 1999; Godschalk 2003; Pelling 2003; Campanella 2006). In the past five to ten years however, ideas of social-ecological resilience and evolutionary resilience have increasingly emphasised the importance of moving beyond recovery to understand the dynamics that facilitate the adaptability and transformability of urban systems in the face of changes of many kinds and of uncertainty regarding the course that change may take (Pelling 2011; Wilkinson 2011; Chelleri 2012; Davoudi 2012; Coaffee 2013; Davoudi, Brooks, and Mehmood 2013). This has helped to focus attention on the relation between urban governance and urban fabric in enabling cities and/or urban areas to develop the adaptive capacities necessary to transform.

However, to date, there have been few explorations of social-ecological or evolutionary resilience theory through case-studies of adaptation and adaptability in the built environment (though notable exceptions include Lu and Stead 2013; Davoudi, Brooks, and Mehmood 2013). Given that evolutionary resilience is defined as a process rather than a fixed characteristic of urban systems, there has been a particularly striking lack of either longitudinal or

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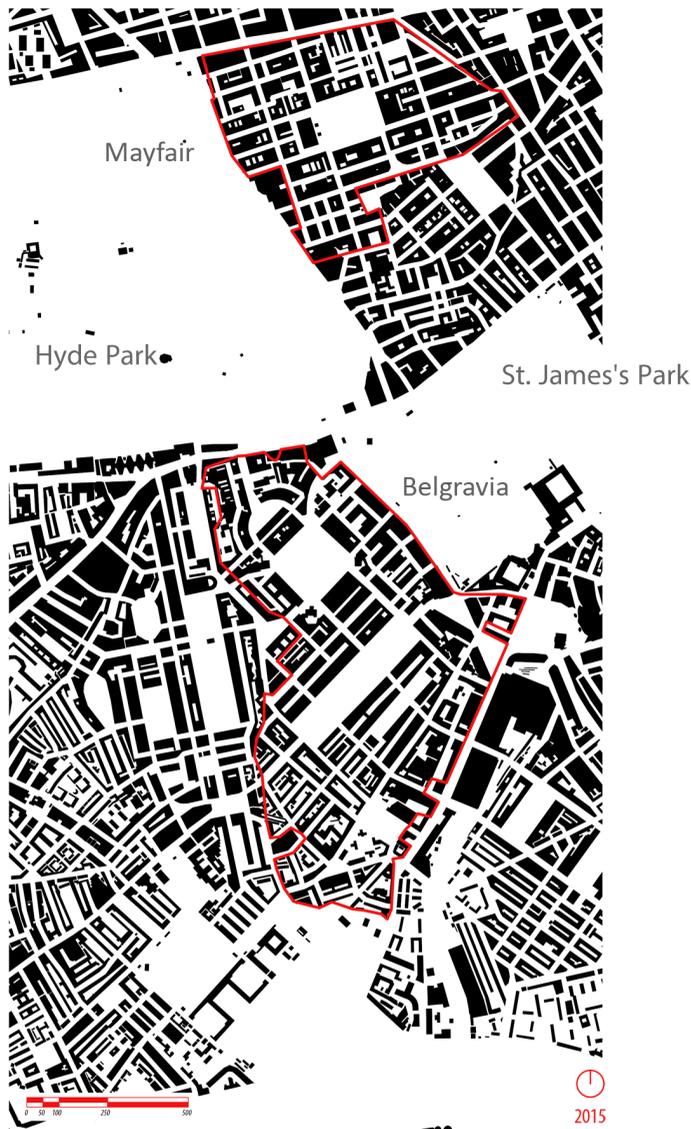
historical studies that would facilitate critical exploration of adaptive practices and capacities shaped through the relations of governance and development over time (Engle 2011).

The primary aim of this paper is to address this gap through the analysis of a case study which has been in the making for considerable time. This is the Grosvenor Estate, one of London Great Estates. These are large-scale urban landholdings that were first developed under aristocratic family ownership during the Georgian era of urban expansion following the Great Fire of London of 1666 (see Summerson 1945). This ownership has continued to a significant extent over the centuries since, and the related management – or “stewardship” as it has been termed – has had an important bearing on how different neighbourhoods of West London that they encompass have developed to become what they were at the time of writing.

The Great Estates have been described as exemplars of effectively managed evolution in response to change in several non-academic publications in recent times (New London Architecture 2013; Yates 2014; Allen 2016). This management or stewardship is said in one such to “have created a resilient cycle of change and renewal” that offers lessons for new large-scale, mixed-use areas of regeneration in contemporary London such as King’s Cross and the site of the 2012 Olympic Games which may take decades to develop (New London Architecture 2013). These lessons relate particularly to the challenge of addressing changing pressures and constraints over the course of a long-term development process, while endeavouring to realise particular visions or legacies.

The Grosvenor Estate was first acquired by the aristocratic Grosvenor family in 1677. The resulting real-estate in Mayfair and Belgravia (Figure 1) has been managed by Grosvenor’s estate-management office in response to the city’s wider growth and transformation ever since. Grosvenor itself has engaged with the concept of resilience in recent times. It has carried out research on the resilience of cities worldwide according to a defined set of measures, considering the potential significance of this for investment strategies (Grosvenor 2013). But resilience also acquired strategic significance for Grosvenor in the more local context of issues facing the London Estate in the early twenty-first century. These related particularly to the ways in which investment patterns in Mayfair and Belgravia had been reshaping their everyday use and architecture, but also to how leasehold reform legislation has helped to erode the intergenerational stewardship and adaptive capacities of urban landholdings and landlords since the 1960s. To date there has been no interrogation of the resilience of Great Estates in relation to academic discussions of evolutionary resilience. A second aim of this paper is, hence, to undertake this analysis.

The paper begins by discussing the notion of resilience in urban studies, concentrating particularly on social-ecological or evolutionary resilience and providing an analytical framework for the case study. Drawing on interviews with managers, it goes on to explore resilience as defined by Grosvenor, in relation to challenges or vulnerabilities that the Estate was facing at the time of research and to the continuity of land ownership and the ability to manage change. Next, it turns to the history of the Estate to explore the specific mechanisms that enabled Grosvenor to continually adapt in response to change. I ask: what kinds of change has Grosvenor responded to and how? What has the significance of large-scale ownership and long-term management been in terms of spatial, physical and social adaptability? Lastly, the paper comes back to the present time of research and writing to focus on Grosvenor’s contemporary conception of stewardship, exploring what this means in terms of addressing change and building resilience. What is the ethos of stewardship? How does this inform



**Figure 1.** Figure ground plan showing the boundaries of the Estate in 2015 (Nia Rodgers for Juliet Davis).

strategies, decisions and development? Whose and/or what interests are (and have historically been) served by stewardship? Whose resilience is and has been in question?

The concluding section discusses the extent to which, in view of this analysis, Grosvenor seems to illuminate or confound understandings of evolutionary resilience. It will be argued that it does both and that, in both respects, it offers lessons for other large-scale developments as for urban resilience studies more widely.

### The evolution of resilience

It is more than forty years since resilience became the focus of academic debate, initially within the field of ecology. It was defined in a seminal paper published in 1973 by the

theoretical ecologist C.S. Holling who argued that “ecological systems” are not just either stable or unstable, but may persist as sets of relationships even when profoundly affected by change (Holling 1973). From this early theorisation followed the development of two distinct definitions of resilience, as reviewed by Berkes, Folke, and Colding (1998), Gunderson (2000) Folke (2006), Scheffer (2009) and Folke et al. (2010), for example. The first, described by Holling (1996) as “engineering resilience” denotes the time it takes for any system to resume equilibrium following a specific disturbance. It defines the efficiency of systems in bouncing back to a steady-state following disturbance and encourages the development of planning, design and management strategies to facilitate this.

The second, “ecological resilience,” is defined as “the magnitude of disturbance that can be absorbed before the system changes its structure by changing the variables and processes that control behaviour” (Holling 1996, 33). This notion encompasses the possibility of multiple stability domains which systems may transition between (Gunderson 2000; Folke et al. 2010) It is measured, not according to the time of return to an original state of equilibrium, but by the extent of disturbance that a system can tolerate before, as Gunderson puts it (2000, 426), it “flips into another regime of behaviour – i.e. to another stability domain.”

Resilience first appeared in urban studies, including urban planning and development theory, in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Mileti 1999; Godschalk 2003; Pelling 2003; Walker et al. 2004). Since then, literature on resilient cities, urban resilience, resilient urbanism, and resilient urban planning and design has proliferated. Stemming from the ecological literature, urban resilience has commonly been associated with the capacity of cities, as complex social-economic-physical-environmental systems, to recover from and mitigate risks associated with hazards or disasters. These events have often been seen to include socio-natural hazards such as floods, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes or hurricanes and social crises including terrorist attacks, financial crises and the prospect of peak oil (as reflected, variously, in Godschalk 2003; Pelling 2003; Vale and Campanella 2005; Campanella 2006; Newman, Beatley, and Boyer 2009). This literature encompasses both “engineering” and “ecological” understandings of resilience – the former generally relating to the pace of recovery and, the latter, to flexibility and the continuity of urban system functionality in view of the scale and/or depth of a given crisis.

But, urban resilience has increasingly encompassed a third understanding emerging more recently in ecology and environmental science (Folke et al. 2010; Wilkinson 2011; Caputo et al. 2015). This is usually referred to as social-ecological resilience, though in the urban literature has been termed as “evolutionary resilience” (Davoudi 2012). It was defined largely in response to criticism that the other two definitions denote the continuity of relations within a system and the return to a stable state of some sort following a disturbance (Berkes, Colding, and Folke 2003; Folke 2006). In contrast, social-ecological resilience reflects the capacity of systems to cope with multiple, sequential and/or transforming forms of disturbance and, in the process, to continually adapt (Folke 2006; Folke et al. 2010; Chelleri 2012). It also reflects a growing consideration of the interdependence of social-economic and ecological systems (as socio-ecological systems or SES), and of human action as embedded within and contingent upon ecological systems rather than external and/or controlling them from afar (Adger 2000; Folke et al. 2010). As a result, resilience research and theory has increasingly concentrated on such notions as transition, adaptive cycles and transformability (through learning and innovation), extending beyond classic ideas of recovery, resistance,

equilibrium and persistence (Holling and Gunderson 2002; Folke et al. 2002,2010; Walker et al. 2004; Scheffer 2009).

In the process, scholars have also drawn attention to the importance of understanding the relation between vulnerability and resilience (Adger 2006; Gallopín 2006; Janssen and Ostrom 2006; Smit and Wandel 2006; Berkes 2007). Vulnerability refers to the exposure of SESs to risks associated with impending, possible change, drawing attention to how knowledge of the future may affect resilience. Reducing vulnerability relies on identifying the conditions that make systems more susceptible to stress and on developing adaptive capacity. This, in Adger's words, denotes "the ability of a system to [...] expand the variability with which it can cope," enabling it to adjust to different kinds, scales and durations of change (Adger 2006, 270).

It relies on possessing the ability not only to react to stress, but to adequately prepare for the future by, for example, developing understandings of threats on the horizon but also by dealing with realities of uncertainty and contingency. As Berkes (2007, 285) puts it, building resilience must involve discovering "ways to reduce the degree of uncertainty about the dynamics of [complex social-ecological] systems. But, at the same time, given that 'our ability to predict [the] future will never be complete,'" it must also involve understanding how to cope with uncertainty and even to shape the course of change.

Organisational and management studies of adaptive capacity concentrate on the role of social institutions and governance in addressing vulnerability and building resilience in social-ecological systems (Gallopín 2006; Smit and Wandel 2006; Engle and Lemos 2010; Gupta et al. 2010; Engle 2011; Lu and Stead 2013). Adaptive capacity is said to involve a number of related abilities, key among which are: (i) learning collectively from experience and creating a repository for social memory of dealing with past challenges, (ii) confronting surprise or uncertainty with related knowledge and vision, (iii) having the means and flexibility to organise a response to crisis, (iv) preparing for the future, and, (v) initiating actions to facilitate adaptation/innovative transformation through the various stages of an adaptive cycle. How these abilities are acquired is seen to depend on the effectiveness of the everyday activities that shape institutional cultures such as communication, coordination, deliberation, feedback loops and decision-making (Dietz, Ostrom, and Stern 2003; Engle and Lemos 2010).

As Engle argues, these activities are also crucial to way in which adaptive capacity is distributed across communities (Engle 2011, 649). Indeed, adaptive capacity has become associated with theories of good governance, social responsibility and the stewardship of dynamic environments which emphasise the interrelations and value of all components in a system (Chapin et al. 2009; Folke et al. 2010). Discussed in relation to SESs, stewardship denotes forms of management predicated on the ethos of "sustaining or enhancing the integrity and diversity of ecosystems as well as the adaptive capacity and well-being of society," as Chapin et al. (2009) put it. However, there is an emerging urban stewardship literature which relates to the ways in which socio-ecological resilience thinking has entered urban studies (for example, Tidball et al. 2010; Connolly et al. 2013). This considers stewardship to describe forms of ethical action which attend to matters of common well-being, such as by tending gardens and maintaining other shared resources in the urban environment.

In general, social-ecological or evolutionary resilience promotes the view of cities as systems encompassing a diverse array of social, political, physical and economic components and their dynamic, never static, interrelations (Wilkinson 2011; Davoudi 2012; Coaffee 2013;

Davoudi, Brooks, and Mehmood 2013). It encourages an understanding of change as complex too, encompassing gradual or rapid, subtle or high-impact, predicted or surprise, singular or multifaceted, and present, cyclical, or continually unfolding forms of transformation. In contrast to the emphasis of positivist planning and design on creating order and stability, and on controlling the future through physical development, it focuses attention on the design of processes that can interact with, respond flexibly to, and also shape, incremental change (Davoudi 2012). Hence, evolutionary resilience is associated with approaches that facilitate adaptability and adaptation within cities, not just resistance or the absorption of change. Indeed, these are key themes within the climate change and urban resilience literature that has burgeoned within the last decade (Leichenko 2011; Pelling 2011; Davoudi, Brooks, and Mehmood 2013; Lu and Stead 2013). Given the uncertainty of the future as well as the nature of specific threats or risks, these approaches are seen to require the integration of forecasting, mitigatory strategies, long-range visioning, development, and governance to ensure the continuity of urban systems.

Building urban resilience is also often seen to rely on joined-up approaches to decision-making (Goldstein 2009; Ahern 2011; Lu and Stead 2013; Taşan-Kok and Eraydin 2013). Following theories of adaptive capacity, resilience is often seen as related to governance arrangements that facilitate social inclusion, collaboration, participatory processes, grass roots agency and the redistribution of power and benefits across the social component of urban systems. Similarly, processes that facilitate learning and memory-building, that enhance preparedness, and enable transformation, are also regarded as key.

In exploring possible case studies of urban resilience, this suggests the need to consider the significance of the politics of urban change, including the relationship between top-down and/or bottom-up processes, and of the role of capital in shaping relative vulnerabilities in the city (Raco and Street 2012; Davoudi 2014; Vale 2014). There is a need for alertness not only to how and why resilience can come to be enjoyed by some citizens at the expense of others, but to human intentionality in relation to resilience-building processes (Engle and Lemos 2010; Gupta et al. 2010; Lu and Stead 2013; DeVerteuil 2015).

We turn now to Grosvenor and its London Estate to critically examine the relation between ideas of evolutionary resilience as the capacity of urban systems to adapt to and shape change, and the development and management history of a Great Estate. The following sections are structured according to the following key themes: vulnerability, adaptive capacity and stewardship. I begin with a brief introduction to the Estate.

## Introduction to the case study

The London Estate comprises 300 acres of developed land within the London Borough of Westminster and includes some of the best-known examples of Georgian and Victorian architecture in Britain (see Figure 2). Encompassing Mayfair and Belgravia, it has been in the making for three centuries at the time of writing under a form of urban management that has its origins in pre-capitalist, feudal English society. The Grosvenors are one of the oldest aristocratic families in the UK, tracing their ancestry back to Hugh Lupus, a nephew of William the Conqueror (Sutherland 1988).

Grosvenor is a property group privately owned by Trustees of the Estate on behalf of the family. At the time of writing, this is led by the young seventh Duke of Westminster, Hugh Grosvenor, who succeeded his father Gerald in August 2016 and who is the sixty-eighth



**Figure 2.** Aerial View of Belgravia, showing the built fabric developed by Thomas Cubitt (Jonathan Webb, [webbaviation.co.uk](http://webbaviation.co.uk)).

wealthiest person in the world. The group operates across the globe and its physical assets in the UK encompass large rural landholdings including the 10,000 acre Eaton Estate in Cheshire (the Duke of Westminster's seat) as well as the London Estate. This wealth in itself suggests a quite different sort of resilience from that outlined above – the resilience of the landed elite in British society rather than evolutionary urban resilience. However, the focus of the analysis that follows, as outlined in the introduction, is on the relation between Grosvenor's engagement with notions of resilience, adaptive capacity and stewardship, and academic understandings of them, seeking to identify both overlaps and differences in contexts of urban development and change.

The research for this paper was undertaken in 2015–2016. It involved exploring records of Grosvenor's development history at Grosvenor Archive at the City of Westminster, fifteen in-depth interviews with estate managers in 2015–2016, and the analysis of a range of strategic, vision and urban design documents and reports. Questions asked in interviews were aimed at understanding: (i) issues of vulnerability and resilience for the Estate; (ii) Grosvenor's adaptive capacity in terms of processes that enabled it to learn from experience, prepare for the future and initiate actions, including how these could be traced through the *longue durée* of the planning and development history of the Estate from the 1720s; (iii) the notion of stewardship and its connection to resilience-thinking. In the final, concluding section, a summary of the analysis is provided, coming back to the academic literature in the process.

Throughout the analysis, the name Grosvenor is used to denote the organisation responsible for the management of the landholding and either "the Grosvenor Estate" or "the Estate" are used to denote the landholding itself. Both the management and physical Estate have transformed substantially over time, as described in detail in the Survey of London volumes

on the Grosvenor Estate (Survey of London 1977, 1980). We begin with the contexts in which resilience became a key concern for Grosvenor.

## Vulnerability and resilience for Grosvenor

As issues of vulnerability and resilience in the city are often associated with informal urbanisms and/or disadvantaged communities, it is often implied that more prosperous areas are more resilient. And yet, for Grosvenor, which manages some of the most expensive areas of London, it was prosperity that was the issue that led to concerns regarding the Estate's resilience. Since the turn of the millennium, fine townhouses in Mayfair and Belgravia had increasingly become a focus for investment for overseas buyers for whom "old money" West London has represented a haven for secure, liquid, tax-efficient investment. A classical style, stuccoed townhouse in Belgrave Square would fetch in the order of £75,000,000 in mid-2016; a seven-bed terrace in Eaton Square from £55,000,000 to around three times than; and a one to two bed flat in Mayfair around £1,000,000.

The Estate had stood to benefit from the 90% rise of the Central London property market since 2005. However, Grosvenor managers generally took the view that vulnerability was created as absent owners led to a deadening urban environment. The garden squares were rarely occupied other than by Grosvenor's employees, windows were dark at night and local roads were little more than rat-runs for taxis. Some streets in Belgravia felt not only sterile but "would actually be quite scary places at night," said the Location Director for North Belgravia. This reflected, for him, how, in London, the "value of property is driven by its value as an investment [and no longer by] its value as an occupational good." As the Executive Director of the London Estate put it, the asset value of the Estate may currently be high, but "we should not kid ourselves that we have not suffered a loss" through declining vitality.

Another feature of this investment pattern was the increasing development of what the Heritage Director described as underground "iceberg" extensions to houses of up to two stories in depth accommodating the "car museums, the swimming pools, the cinemas and wine cellars" and sometimes also the servants' quarters that their owners desired. These reflected an escalation of expectations of what properties should provide in the context of spiralling land values, even as their actual usage by super-rich owners was falling. As the Estate was protected under the Conservation Area status designated by Westminster City Council and many properties were listed, the only place for these desires to be channelled had been downward, into the ground.

While disruption resulting from construction may be regarded as a temporary inconvenience, the threat posed to historic fabric as well as to the tranquillity of a residential enclave had led Grosvenor to increasingly oppose what the Executive Director described as "developers extracting too much value relative to the amenity of their neighbours" and to encourage Westminster City Council to resist related planning applications. Some managers were concerned that empty homes also exposed Grosvenor open to criticism at a time of rapid population growth in London, yet increasing economic disparity across the city, raising questions of the role of landowning families such as the Grosvenors (who are wealthier than the poorest 10% of the UK population) in addressing urban issues, or of their complicity in social exclusions.

Empty homes were distributed across the Estate. However, Estate managers often pointed out that the areas in which their impacts were particularly apparent were those which they

no longer owned outright. This brings me on to a second understanding of vulnerability for Grosvenor. As a result of Leasehold Reform legislation UK passed by the UK government in 1967 and 1993, residents who had historically leased properties and paid a ground rent had gained the right to acquire them outright (Land Registry 2015). Properties that were converted into multiple occupancy dwellings or offices, or that were mixed use, were typically not affected. But, across single household areas, including much of Belgravia, losses had been extensive.

These losses transformed Grosvenor's historic capacity to manage the Estate through the combination of selling leases and recouping them for improvement, adaptation, or redevelopment at their expiry. As a result, they transformed the historical relations and forms of exchange between landlord and tenants that had continued since the eighteenth century. And, although Grosvenor retained some management control over property, amenities and common areas according to the terms of a Estate Management Scheme provided under the Leasehold Reform Act of 1967, they also affected Grosvenor's ability to control the development of individual properties.

A key aim of building resilience was thus to find new ways of counteracting vacancy and creating value in the areas where Grosvenor still held freehold ownership. This broad strategy had focused managers' attention on cultivating uses of public realm, enhancing the retail environment and adapting certain buildings to accommodate public functions such as markets and galleries.

Informed by a public realm strategy for Mayfair and Belgravia produced for Grosvenor by the office of the Danish architect Jan Gehl in 2009, changes had been made to sites including the raised terrace of Brown Hart Gardens in Mayfair, Edwardian Mount Street in Mayfair and Elizabeth Street in Belgravia to improve the environment for pedestrians, increase the potential for *al fresco* eating and drinking, and to support retail management strategies (Figures 3 and 4). Buildings that had been either converted or were being converted to publicly accessible uses included the deconsecrated St. Marks church in Mayfair which was to become



**Figure 3.** Photograph of contemporary Mount Street illustrating public realm improvements (Juliet Davis, 2015).



**Figure 4.** Photograph of the remodelled Brown Hart Gardens (Juliet Davis, 2015).

a retail emporium and restaurant and a post-war office building which had been transformed into the beautiful Gagosian Art Gallery by Caruso St. John Architects.

With the urban design group Publica, Grosvenor had also developed a new “Vision for Mayfair and Belgravia” looking ahead 25 years. This encompassed a set of strategic principles for building resilience including adaptations to facilitate population densification, encouraging employment diversity, supporting design for future adaptability, ensuring the permeability of the Estate to surrounding areas, and developing green infrastructure and strategies for preserving biodiversity and environmental health. Grosvenor, in other words, was engaging in a range of actions to manage the effects of change and to seek to shape it going forwards.

However, the overarching aim of building resilience was to secure the Grosvenor family’s position and wealth long-term by maintaining a source of revenue as well as the capacity to control and adapt it. Such economic and power-based resilience is clearly very different from evolutionary resilience with its emphasis on the broader urban environment and urban society in general.

But, Grosvenor Estate managers emphasised that the value of this long-term ownership was, at least in part, that it created benefits for both places and inhabitants which more short-term, piecemeal and conventional market-driven development processes, regulated through the neoliberal planning system, often failed to achieve. These were seen to relate to Grosvenor’s adaptive capacity and its ethos of stewardship, forged over its three-hundred-year management history.

### **Developing the Grosvenor Estate in Mayfair and Belgravia: framing adaptive capacity and stewardship**

Adaptive capacity was seen to stem from the way in which the Estate was first developed. The landholding, which originally included the area of Pimlico as well as Mayfair and

Belgravia, was acquired by the Grosvenor family in 1677 through the marriage of the Cheshire baronet Sir Thomas Grosvenor to Mary Davies, its heiress. Their son, Sir Richard Grosvenor obtained an Act of Parliament in 1711 to enable him to grant building leases in Mayfair which lay within those areas that were rapidly urbanising following the 1666 Great Fire of London. As Whitfield puts it, this facilitated a form of development based on “private initiative, private money and private taste” that would shape London’s growth in the advent of metropolitan government or town planning in the UK for nearly two hundred years (2006, 170).

The plan for Mayfair was drawn up by Thomas Barlow who was the Estate Surveyor (Summerson 1945, 94). The title of Estate Surveyor was sometimes used interchangeably with “Steward” – one responsible for upkeep on behalf of the aristocratic Lord. The idea of stewardship had an important place in feudal rural estate management as early as the twelfth century (Kelly 1986). A rural land steward’s role, as described by John Lawrence (1806, 39–55), was to identify deficiencies or potentials for improvement, and to deal in a holistic way with matters of “insurance, dates of leases, rates, nuisances, trespasses, game, live and dead stock, timber, fencing, draining, paths and highways, culture and adjoining commons.” In the urban context, it involved a mix of planning, development control, and the management of both buildings and tenants. Its purpose was to develop a long-standing family through the skilful, sustainable management of urban land as a productive resource.

Mayfair’s layout has been described as “an exercise in disciplined, straightforward town planning” (Survey of London 1977) with its simple a grid of streets and large Grosvenor Square in the middle. Development involved the establishment of Building Agreements with the developers who leased the plots defined in Barlow’s plan. These contractual documents were not prescriptive of all aspects of the architecture that followed, but they did set out numerous expectations regarding building standards, materials, party walls, the purposes of development and the construction of such infrastructure as roadways. They were key in restricting the development of the Estate for industrial uses which were becoming prevalent in London such as “butcher (both shop and slaughter-house), tallow chandler, soapmaker, tobacco-pipe maker, brewer, victualler, coffee-house proprietor, distiller, farrier, pewterer, working brazier and blacksmith” (Survey of London 1977). The sheer number of developers who were active in Mayfair in the mid-eighteenth century (more than 200) ensured a diversity of interpretations of the same principles. This has remained a feature of the area’s architecture through time (Figure 5).

Development began in Belgravia (and Pimlico) a century later, in the 1820s. Belgravia proceeded from the basis of a similarly simple layout of streets and grand squares (Eaton Square, Belgrave Square, Lowndes Square and Chester Square) prepared by the Estate Surveyor of the day, Thomas Cundy. As Hobhouse (1971) explains, in Belgravia land was dominated by a single developer, Thomas Cubitt, leading to a far more uniform and controlled urban landscape of Italianate villas and grand terraces than in Mayfair. Cubitt took on much of the civil-engineering work for roads and sewers and he laid out squares, planted gardens and installed the street lighting. Grosvenor, however, provided the space of the public realm that created the setting for the architecture and carried responsibility for maintaining infrastructure and public services (Hobhouse 1971, 116–151).

In the main, the initial householders who acquired leases in the squares and principal streets of both areas were from the upper class and aristocracy including peers of the realm. As development proceeded however, quite different populations were accommodated in other, less desirable areas than the main squares, such as at the fringes of the Estate. This



**Figure 5.** Figure ground plan of the Estate in 1800 (Nia Rodgers for Juliet Davis).

reflected Grosvenor's responsiveness to different markets and capacity to manage a cross section of London life and land-use. Thus, in contrast to Grosvenor Square, Old Mount Street was a place of small houses for artisans and shopkeepers and a focus for trades including cabinet making and upholstery, for example.

From the 1860s into the early 90s, land in north Mayfair, close to Oxford Street, was leased to the Improved Industrial Dwelling Company – a philanthropic provider of housing for the poor at a time of housing crisis in rapidly industrialising London – to build mansion-blocks of flats (Survey of London 1980; Dennis 1989). Their construction reflected the concerns of the second Marquess of Westminster and his son, the 1st Duke of Westminster, with the widespread problems of slum housing in late-nineteenth century London, and their related

desires to address these while protecting prestigious parts of the Estate from the “tarnish” of proximity to degraded areas (Dennis 1989, 50). They exemplify Grosvenor’s capacity, resulting from the scale of the landholding, to address and manage different needs and markets, taking a stand as a place-custodian regarding urban issues in the process.

The build-out of both areas was complete by 1900, as shown in Figure 6. By the late-nineteenth century some parts of the Estate, particularly in Mayfair, had become subject to adaptation or redevelopment in response to changing pressures and demands. In the coming section, I focus on the nature of some of changes that occurred during the twentieth century, on how established patterns of development informed adaptation, and consider the adaptive capacity created through the continuity of place and property management.

## Change and adaptive capacity

Beginning just before the First World War, the market for enormous town houses in West London that had formed the basis of the early development of the Estate began to decline, leading to depreciating values and uncertainty regarding the future (Survey of London 1977). This process continued in the Interwar period and was associated with the fall in the fortunes of the British aristocracy more widely (Cannadine 1990).

It was further exacerbated in the 1940s when the Estate suffered severe damage as an unanticipated consequence of the Second World War. Many buildings were totally destroyed in the Blitz. Even more were severely damaged, and most of those which survived were in need of maintenance. Whole areas such as Eaton Square in Belgravia were almost derelict by the late 1940s.

A quite different sort of change which also had consequences for Grosvenor was the rise of town planning during the Interwar period and the forms of control this led to after the War. The zoning of land use, the redevelopment of outworn buildings, and the preservation of historic fabric had remained private matters up until this time (Survey of London 1977, 67–82). However, the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act and local planning authority legislation made the state increasingly active in development management, transforming the historic status of the Grosvenor family and Board of Trustees regarding the future of the Estate at a time of profound change and challenge.

However, as a result of its ownership and ability to lease property, Grosvenor had a number of options at its disposal in terms of responding to change and initiating actions to facilitate adaptation. It could establish new leasing arrangements on the reversion of properties, sell properties, adapt or redevelop, depending on the circumstances of change. As property was becoming increasingly hard to let in the early twentieth century, the Estate’s Board of Trustees took to granting longer leases of 63 years (whereas shorter leases than this had been common). This helped the Estate to ride out the period of uncertainty, spreading the burden and risk of investment in upkeep and improvement across leaseholders in the short to mid-term, but without losing ownership and the potential to regain control later.

In 1925, Grosvenor became empowered to grant far longer leases of 999-year leases. After the Second World War, faced with costly restoration and changing demands for property in Mayfair and Belgravia, long leases of this kind were issued for several prominent sites. But, while these offered ways of shedding some of the risks associated with uncertainty without ultimately relinquishing the landholding, the ability to respond to change relating to the



**Figure 6.** Figure ground plan of the Estate in 1900 (Nia Rodgers for Juliet Davis).

relevant properties was lost for such a long period of time as to pass beyond the scope of any strategy, as was some flexibility regarding change across the landholding.

At the expiry of leases, during times of greater certainty regarding the trajectory of markets or at the instigation of the Duke, Grosvenor could make capital investments and initiate physical change directly. The structure of leases created an ability to adapt or redevelop individual buildings but, on occasion, whole blocks could be addressed. On different projects, it could take a more or less central role regarding development and it could also control the urban and general architectural form.

An example taken from the late-nineteenth century is the redevelopment of Old Mount Street and Carlos Place in Mayfair between 1870 and 1895, a project driven by the 1st Duke's

desire to significantly upgrade the architectural quality of the street and, ultimately, be able to raise ground rents (Survey of London 1980, 319–321) (Figure 7). Another, from a generation later, is the redevelopment of Grosvenor Square from 1926 to 1964. This occurred under the Estate Surveyor Dettmar Blow and reflected Grosvenor's decision to address the changing market for homes by replacing eighteenth century houses with flats and hotels (Survey of London 1980, 319–321). A similar process of transformation occurred in Cubitt's Eaton Square in Belgravia, though this involved adapting townhouses rather than comprehensively redeveloping them.

These three examples reflect the flexibility created by Grosvenor's overall ownership and patient capital in terms of addressing change though, in each case, challenges relating to existing development plots, block-forms and complex lease structures had to be addressed. In Mount Street, complete transformation involved being able to redraw the lines of development plots as a starting point, but negotiations with inhabitants, whose leases expired at different times, were complex and political (Figure 8). A similar exercise was undertaken for Grosvenor Square (Figure 9). However, here, some older properties had to be preserved within the fabric of the redevelopment in the end as their lease expiry dates were set so far into the future that Grosvenor was not prepared to buy them back. The inconsistent approach taken to the redevelopment of the different sides of Grosvenor Square, with the Georgian style adopted for the north range (Figure 10) contrasting radically with the architect Eero Saarinen's modernist American Embassy for the west side, reflected the scope created by the unanticipated intervention of the Second World War midway through the redevelopment to consider a quite different use and solution for part of the project.

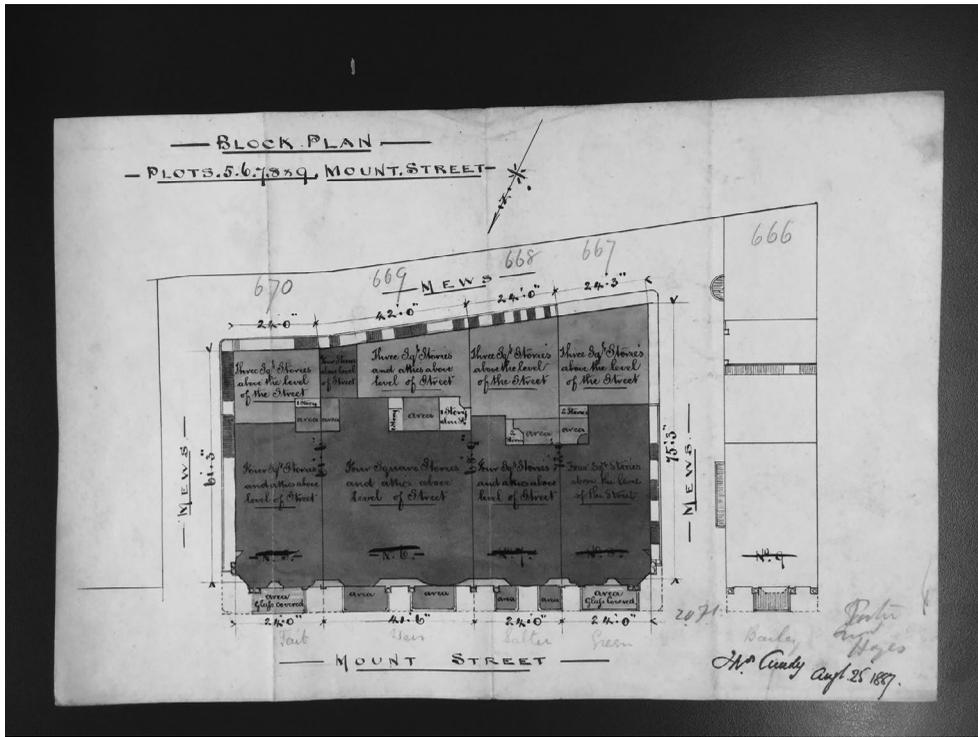
By 1964, when the rebuilding of Grosvenor Square was at last complete, Mayfair was in another process of transformation. Many of its residential properties had been converted temporarily into offices during the War, but these needed to be converted back afterwards according to terms set by Westminster City Council. However, Grosvenor recognised that there was a stronger market for offices than residences at that time and was keen to retain them. A number of temporary-use arrangements were extended until the 1990s with Westminster's agreement, and Grosvenor also managed to secure permanent changes of use for a number of buildings. This turned out to be an effective commercial strategy as residential demand in Mayfair remained low throughout the rest of the twentieth century, only resurging again in the late 1990s.

In response to the issues of flexibility created by complex lease structures, all lease dates were rationalised across the Estate in the mid-1950s leading to common expiry dates being set for each block of terraces. One former, now retired Chief Executive I interviewed who had led Grosvenor in the late 1950s, described this as part of a wider shift from the management of ground rents to more proactively preparing for the future by, as he put it, "creating redevelopment opportunities" but, eventually, by also developing a plan for coping with change on the horizon.

Catalysts for this change of approach included various risks and threats: the urban decline that accompanied the aftermath of the War (which, despite Grosvenor's capacities to rebuild and transform, resulted in the drastic sale of the particularly damaged Pimlico Estate in 1953), the commercialisation of the West End, conflicts with Westminster, and the imposition of state-power in the form of the "Greater London Development Plan" and the Leasehold Reform Act of 1967. The huge, 100-year "Grosvenor Estate Strategy for Mayfair and Belgravia" produced by Chapman Taylor and Gerald Eve in 1971 was the first major outcome of this new



Figure 7. Elevation drawing showing the appearance of Old Mount Street (Grosvenor Estate and the Westminster City Archives).



**Figure 8.** Mount Street – typical block plan (Grosvenor Estate and the Westminster City Archives).

approach. This was only succeeded by the “Vision for Mayfair and Belgravia” (described briefly above) in 2015.

The 1971 strategy was designed to provide “not an inflexible masterplan for a once-and-for-all operation” but a forward-looking framework for responding to a city “moving and change at a faster pace, lack[ing] the value and certainties of the cultural pattern” than Grosvenor had worked with in the past (Chapman Taylor Partners 1971, 4). Large-scale land-ownership, clearly, was key to being able to develop an urban vision for the Estate in response to broader dynamics within London. It enabled Grosvenor not only to address planning policy but also to begin to drive it, and it helped ensure that the Great Estate model continued to have a role alongside city and local-authority-level planning in the post-War era.

This role depended, at least in part, on recognition of the value of Grosvenor’s deep, accumulated knowledge of the Estate’s history, urban fabric and community and of its experience with regard to managing change. The authors of the 1971 strategy certainly put forward the view that Grosvenor’s understanding of the past was (and should be) of value for Westminster in endeavouring to look into the (uncertain) future of Mayfair and Belgravia as of other areas in Westminster.

Within contemporary Grosvenor (as at the time of research in 2016), managers continued see their actions as part of a tradition and this clearly informed their approaches to the careful approach taken to the Estate’s continuing, incremental development as well as its heritage and preservation. Connection to the past and a sense of continuity of place and

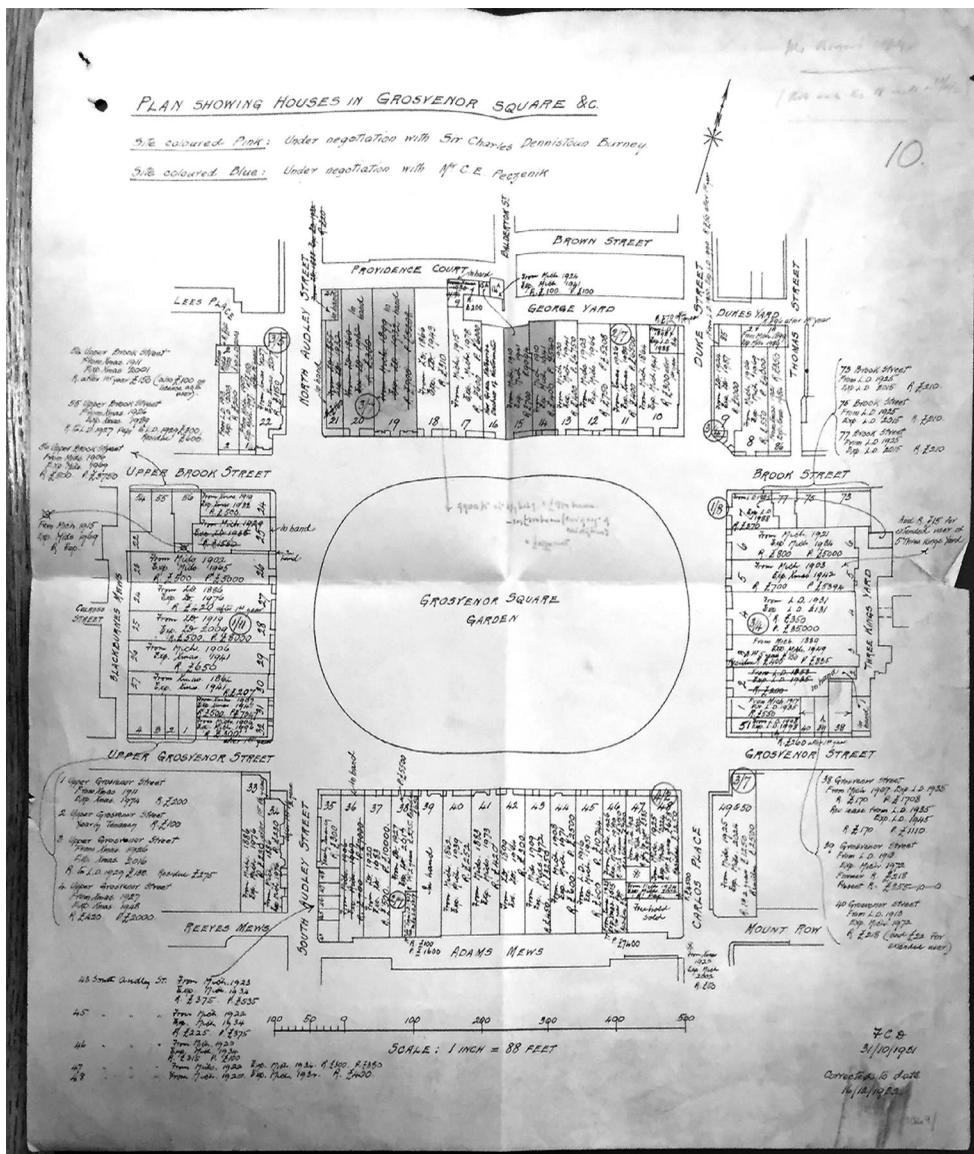


Figure 9. Grosvenor Square lease plan (Grosvenor Estate and the Westminster City Archives).

purpose are reflected in the very role of Estate Surveyor which connected the person in that position in 2016 all the way back to Thomas Barlow in 1720.

**Stewardship as the good management of urban change**

This role and that of the London Estate management more broadly continued to be described as “stewardship.” This was clearly a different process to the stewardship of the eighteenth century, related to Grosvenor’s evolution into an international property company embedded in the dynamics of the global, capitalist real-estate industry. Notwithstanding, stewardship



**Figure 10.** Photograph of Grosvenor Square showing the North Range (Juliet Davis, 2015).

continued to denote the holistic management of the Estate as a dynamic, continually evolving place through a combination of planning, development, real-estate strategy, letting, maintenance and even curating the public realm. Managers identified three primary features of contemporary stewardship as good or responsible management in the context of urban change.

Reflecting commercial priorities, The London Estate's Executive Director described it, firstly, as the process of making the "platform" of the landholding as attractive as possible to occupants and investors. This involved developing the Estate in response to emerging markets and responding to attractive financial offers. But it also involved considering the possible consequences for the character of the Estate of "exploitative" forms of development (as he put it) or of the predominance of particular kinds of use or user. Thus, stewardship involved continually assessing the pressures of the market in view of Grosvenor's aim of sustaining a diverse, distinctive, and high-quality environment and taking decisions in favour of long-term value rather than risky opportunities to maximise gain in the present.

One example taken from the many activities that this involved was the careful setting of retail rent levels to ensure that mixed-use streets were not monopolised by chains but accommodated a mix of independent businesses that could serve residential and business communities and help sustain the character of inner city neighbourhoods. Another was the process of ensuring that new development was context-specific and respectful towards the historical form and fabric of the Estate. At 20 Grosvenor Street, for example, the redevelopment by Flanagan Lawrence Architects did not mimic the architectural style of older buildings across the Estate, but responded to the scale of its neighbours and to the composition of their façades. In contrast, façade retention schemes such as remodelled Victorian mansion blocks on Duke Street and South Audley Street allowed Grade II listed buildings to be both preserved and adapted to new, high-end uses.

Second, stewardship generally "alludes to those decisions that are taken for the wider benefit than [necessarily] the immediate benefit" to the family's asset holdings, as the Estate

Surveyor put it. These decisions included the exemplary conservation of national built heritage for the enjoyment of future generations. They included costly investments in the public realm and in building conversions to provide public amenities such as galleries and gardens, for no direct financial gain for Grosvenor. Historic examples also included gestures of generosity including the gift of a bag of coal to tenants by the Duke and his family at Christmas and the remittance of rents to those whose properties had been damaged in the Blitz (Sutherland 1988, 83). Contemporary stewardship was no longer paternalistic in this way, though communication with tenants with the aim of understanding and being responsive to needs continued to be regarded as important.

This was reflected in Grosvenor's consultation practices, which involved social housing tenants to ensure that their interests and concerns regarding planned development were represented. The Estate Surveyor had supported tenants by offering time and skills to the bottom-up local Neighbourhood Forums created under the Localism Act, endeavouring to ensure that Community Infrastructure Levy funds from new development were channelled into benefits for inhabitants. Such practices did not mean that tenants who wished to remain on the Estate would not be displaced by market forces, however. In the case of retail, for example, firms who no longer reflected Grosvenor's vision could be displaced at the expiry of leases, even when, as in one case I explored, they had been tenants of the Estate for three generations.

A third, key aspect of stewardship that has already been alluded to relates to the future. Because, as one manager put it, "we understand that we will own the future," Grosvenor was interested in wider and more long-term issues than those merely shaping the daily life and fabric of the Estate, such as climate change and rising levels of inequality in London. This was reflected in projects such as the low-carbon restorations of historic buildings in Belgravia completed in 2016, Passiv-haus initiatives and explorations of affordable housing (for rental) options that could enable Grosvenor to contribute to efforts to help mitigate the effects of London's contemporary housing crisis (according to its interpretation of housing needs). Managers highlighted how testing markets for innovative environmental and residential projects as well as for carrying out retrofit projects on a large-scale was facilitated by large-scale land ownership and patient capital.

There was an implicit assumption conveyed in many interviews that, though it is difficult to assess the financial benefits of looking after place, stewardship made commercial sense long-term. This may or may not turn out to be true, but it certainly seemed clear what the result of such stewardship has been – the creation of two of the most architecturally rich yet socially exclusive places in Britain. In responding to the market and seeking to build value, the Estate had become a prestigious address for businesses, residents and investors but was actually far less socially diverse than in the past (the remnants of Victorian social housing notwithstanding). This was related to the fact that the ethos of stewardship as the sustained and careful management of the Estate was inextricably tied to the imperative of preserving and growing the legacy of the Grosvenor family. This brings us back to points made in the introduction to the Estate above but also on to our conclusions.

## Discussion and conclusions

This paper began with the aim of critically examining the relation between the management of the Grosvenor Estate and academic theories of evolutionary resilience.

In the first empirical section, it was suggested that Grosvenor's conception of resilience differed in key respects from academic conceptions of socio-ecological and evolutionary resilience. Grosvenor's interest in resilience was related, firstly, to its own power and capacity to influence the course of change and sustain the Grosvenor family's inheritance and, secondly, to the economic value of the Estate long-term. Notwithstanding, it did concern the broader Estate in the sense that managers argued that Mayfair and Belgravia would be more generally vulnerable to exploitative forms of development without their intervention and stewardship. It was also clear that long-term ownership and management had borne a strong relationship to how the Estate had evolved in the past, producing the two neighbourhoods as they were at the time of the research over the centuries.

The two sections on the Estate's planning, development and management history served to illustrate the complex and continual nature of urban change which encompasses different speeds and durations, cycles and transitions, and different kinds of crisis and upheaval – from social to economic to political (Davoudi 2012). In turn, it highlighted the value of longitudinal or historical studies focusing on how adaptive cycles unfold in the built environment.

We argued that, through its history, Grosvenor exemplified each of the five key features of adaptive capacity which the existing literature suggests to be important, from learning to innovative transformation (Gupta et al. 2010; Engle 2011; Lu and Stead 2013). Individual estate managers had had the capacity to accumulate experience over the course of their careers, but the continuity of the institution enabled learning and memory-building to take place over many generations. As owner, Grosvenor had been able to respond with experience or know-how to a range of pressures and changes, even those which could not be anticipated in advance. Because of the scale of the landholding, it had also had the flexibility to be able to address different needs and markets, intervene to a greater or lesser extent in the site through design and development and select the timing of its intervention. The ability to issue leases and, in the process, release risk and raise capital while retaining the ability to regain control and instigate change through redesign and redevelopment at lease expiries was a key feature of Grosvenor's adaptive capacity, informing the physical adaptation of the Estate over time. Since the 1970s, adaptive capacity had also been created through future-oriented planning, including researching trends, forecasting and developing spatial visions. These activities enabled Grosvenor to become more conscious of vulnerabilities and uncertainty, and to seek to proactively shape the future rather than merely react through leasing strategies and the ad-hoc adaptation of properties. The integration of planning, development and management had also been key to responsiveness over time, resulting in an incrementally-developed but nonetheless coherent urban fabric integrating buildings of different ages, achieving a balance of conservation and development initiatives and of different land-uses and tenures, and offering a range of public buildings and community resources.

In the final section, the benefits of this in terms of contemporary stewardship (as in 2016) were considered. In accordance with definitions of stewardship in the social-ecological resilience literature (for example, Folke et al. 2010) and emerging urban stewardship literature, Grosvenor's stewardship denoted a kind of resource management predicated on not harming the quality and liveability of the place for its present and future users for commercial gain in the present only. The results included innovative projects that address pressing issues for the future, including that of the planet as a whole through climate change.

However, I questioned the correspondence between looking after a family asset and looking after a piece of the city as the former concentrates attention so heavily on judiciously

responding to markets and on high-end development. Though Grosvenor managers were endeavoring to address arising issues of vacancy through their resilience strategies, it was clear that stewardship had increasingly denoted forms of support for the environment of the very privileged few. The difficulty this raises from the perspective of evolutionary resilience is related to the harms created by the rise of London's property market on swathes of the population through displacement and gentrification (for example, DeVerteuil 2015). But it is also related to the unavoidable imbalances of benefit and power created by the Great Estates' management model altogether.

Overall, this research points to the need for more consideration of ownership models and patterns as key variables in adaptive processes as well as in the politics of resilience. How do the adaptive capacities of areas under single ownership contrast from those under fragmented ownership? How might they inform development in less affluent places? How might they develop in contexts of collective or common ownership? How might this, in turn, transform and broaden the focus and goal of urban resilience beyond real estate management?

In conclusion, Grosvenor illustrates Davoudi's contention (2012) that resilience definitions are at risk of mobilisation in the service of vested interests and elites in the city. However, it also offers valuable resources for understanding and advancing ideas of evolutionary resilience in theory and practice. Chiefly, it does this by highlighting the value of considerations of large-scale, long-term ownership and management in the production and adaptation of urban environments over time. But the ways in which a desire to not harm the future can inform decision-making in the present, introducing a sense of responsibility that guides action, is also important. The Grosvenor Estate is a place and an organisation where a debate is clearly being held over the role of city makers now in relation to the distant future, a future which all our children will inhabit.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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