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MAPPING NEW DELHI'S FUTURE

THE MANY FACADES OF LUTYENS BUNGALOW ZONE

Our approach towards Lutyens Bungalow Zone (LBZ) illustrates a serious concern, that in urban planning in India today significant issues are addressed in isolation. LBZ, the erstwhile capital city of British New Delhi is designated as a Heritage Zone in the Master Plan of Delhi in recognition of “...*(a) significant concentration, linkage or continuity of buildings, structures, groups or complexes united historically or aesthetically by plan or physical development.*” (MPD 2021)

In the debate on the future of Indian cities, planning for Lutyens Bungalow Zone is an opportunity which will be lost if it is treated as yet another ‘project’. There has been little attempt towards aligning aspirations with the unquestionable cultural and ecological significance of the area. Landscape architects value its visionary planning, immense wealth of historic trees and unique open space character; conservationists are concerned about its disappearing heritage; residents demand the rights to build

extensions and new floors; and environmentalists ask to preserve the green lung. The citizen, in the interim, has filled the gap in this debate by choosing to use this space, a luxury in a dense, overcrowded Delhi. The India Gate lawns on a summer evening or its flanking water features during *chatt puja* are a reality that has been kept out of the planning equation for far too long.

LBZ has raised questions of identity and ecology for decades. Housing densities of 14-15 persons/acre here contrast dramatically with densities of 1100-1600/acre in parts of Shahjahanabad (PTI). Associated with the Colonial and then the upper class urban Indians and civil servants, the area earned a reputation for exclusivity. Often in the eye of the storm the area has now made it to the national headlines yet again.

Delhi found itself in a rather bizarre situation a few months ago when, on one hand it made headlines as being one of the most polluted cities globally (*Atmospheric Environment, University of Surrey, 2015*), and, almost simultaneously (August, 2015), the Delhi Urban Art Commission (DUAC) proposed guidelines for densification of parts of the LBZ, one of the few remaining open green zones in the city of 16.8 million people (*Census, 2011*). The impetus for the guidelines was increasing pressure from residents to remove the 'freeze' on development, and allow for more property development benefits. (DUAC, 2015)



Chronological evolution of the LBZ

Planning and design of the British Capital city of New Delhi was based on the Garden City principles of the renowned British thinker, Ebenezer Howard. The city is recognized as one of the enduring examples of this concept with a unique symmetry, order and aesthetic master planning (DUAC, 2015). Its axial symmetry of wide tree-lined avenues, large plots and bungalows reinforced the identity of the iconic east-west axis of Rajpath, a landscape extending from Rashtrapati Bhawan at Raisina Hill to India Gate 'C' hexagon and beyond.

Post-Independence, in response to rapid densification of areas in and around Central Delhi, with the demolition of war-time barracks and the construction of multistoreyed buildings, particularly around Connaught Place, the Government of India imposed a temporary ban on development in this area.

In 1988, the Lutyens Bungalow Zone area was demarcated incorporating an extent of 25.88 sq.km (of which Imperial Delhi was 19.12 sq.km) with restrictive development guidelines in place to maintain the low-rise character of the area. Its expansive boundary, as designated at the time, was a recognition of



↑ | >> India Gate zone, a significant open public space in the city

the importance of both the 'bungalow' architecture as also its landscape planning of axial streets, pedestrian infrastructure, buffers, setbacks and plantation. In order to protect the intent of the scheme, this designation included areas that were not necessarily part of the original concept but later additions. In 2003, the LBZ was revised to include 28.73 sq.km, and declared a heritage zone in the Master Plan of Delhi (MPD).

In 2015, the Delhi Urban Art Commission proposed to redefine the LBZ boundaries, in the 'Lutyens Bungalow Zone- Boundary and Development Guidelines' submitted to the Ministry of Urban Development (Delhi Division). The areas to be excluded from the LBZ comprised the transition areas between the historic zone and the areas administered by MCD, as well as the Central Ridge.

Current concerns

As per the new guidelines, the character of the LBZ would change dramatically (to its detriment), with significant impact on the environment and character

of Delhi. The possibility of using this area for the benefit of a majority has also not been discussed.

Any attempt to address the LBZ has to give due recognition to the planning of its wider footprint, not limiting its significance to the Rajpath corridor. The mandate of the proposed guidelines focuses on the corridor and undermines relevance of related spaces in the conceptualisation of the LBZ planning.

For instance, green corridors along the Ridge, Sardar Patel Marg, and Panchsheel Marg as well as heritage precincts of Lodi Road, Dr Abdul Kalam and Prithviraj Road are key alignments that predate the design of New Delhi. Planting for LBZ conceptualized by Edwin Lutyens for this 'Garden City' mandated a single variety of trees on each arterial road. The significance of a holistic street design structure is not taken into account in realigning boundaries.

It would be of enduring value to Delhi, and other cities to emphasize the herit-

age value of equitable central public spaces, and their connectivity with the wider city expanse through open space networks and greens. Western cities, after having lost much of their heritage to industrialization, have learnt to preserve their historic core addressing the relevance of edges and buffer areas in its protection.

Changing the LBZ boundaries, as is being proposed, will result in disappearance of the edges, buffers, and transitional greens, sharpening the distinction between what remains of this area and the emerging fast-paced developments in its vicinity.

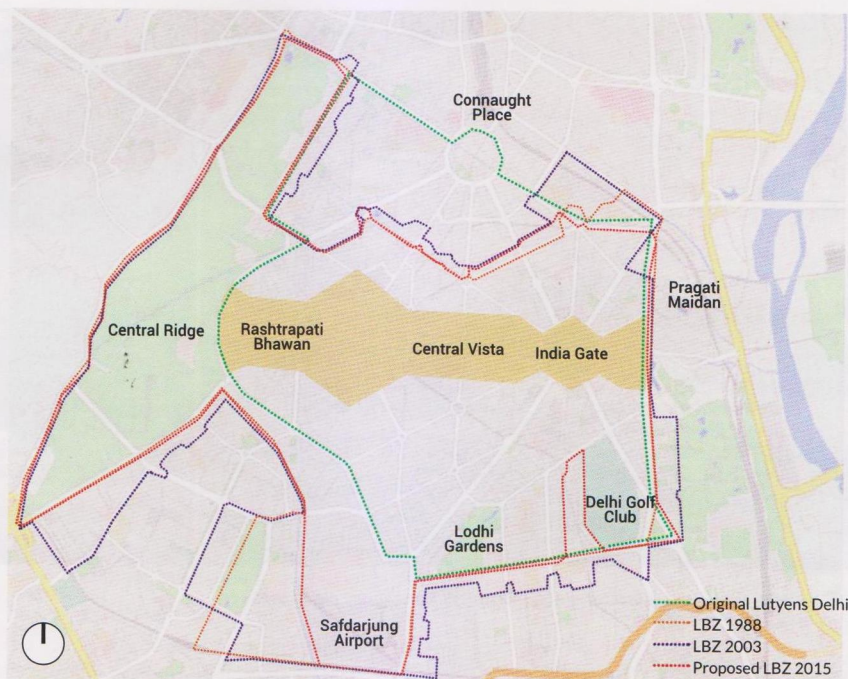
Over a decade, per capita open space in Delhi decreased from 25 sq.m/ person to 15 sq.m/ person (Report, JLL 2011) with its 20% green cover (Indian State of Forest Report, 2009) increasingly compromised. The predominantly green LBZ, a mere 1.7% of the city area has taken over a century to mature. Its loss would adversely impact the habitat it offers in the heart of Delhi to hundreds of species of birds.

The guidelines have been put forth at a time when Delhi is in dire need of a green lung for carbon sequestration, rainwater recharge, improving the micro-climate and other proactive measures to improve its global image. The redevelopment of these areas in the current air pollution crisis is bound to adversely affect Delhi's atmosphere.

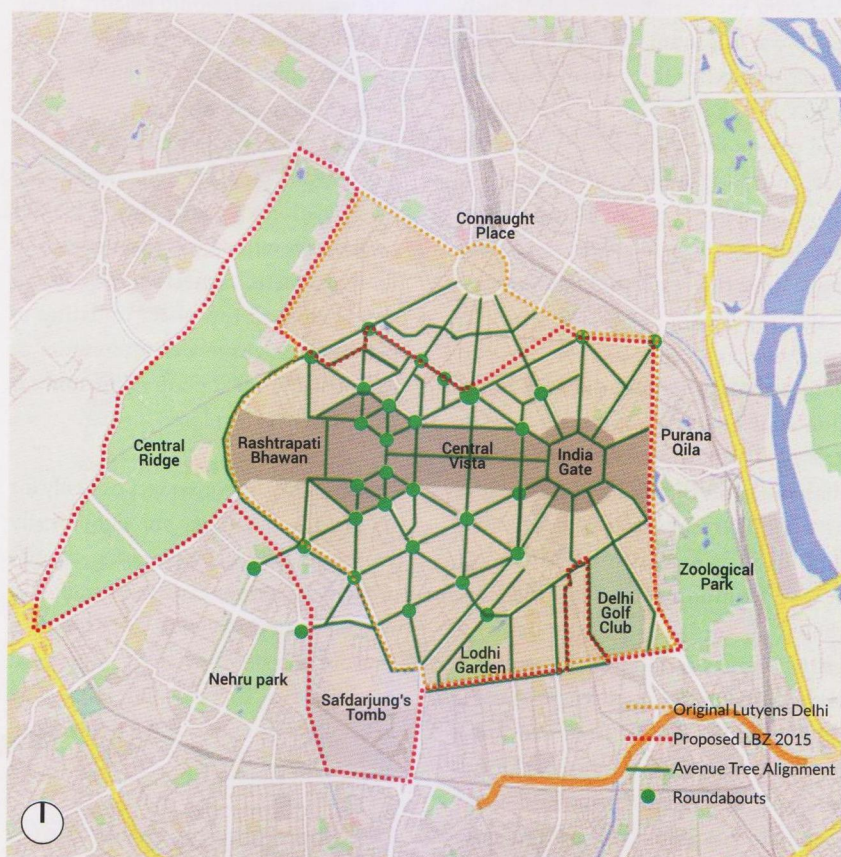
With further densification of the area, as proposed in the guidelines, the current criticality of pollution levels will only worsen with added construction, commerce, traffic, and parking pressures. Pressure on other resources including storm water, sewer and rainwater recharge systems, electricity and communications too have not been thought through. Neither has the critical concern of depletion in groundwater recharge as a consequence of added basements and hard paving, received due consideration.

Way forward

The LBZ is one of three invaluable landscape resources of Delhi; the other two being the Ridge and the River. Nehru Park, Race Course, Delhi Gymkhana Club, Safdarjung airport, Safdarjung Tomb and its precincts, Lodi Garden to the south; Delhi Golf Club on the south-east; and to the east, the Zoological Garden, Purana Qila and Humayun's tomb are contiguous open spaces offering the possibility of creating verdant networks. Fragmentation of this large space compromises the possibility of connecting and creating inclusive open space infrastructure for all sections of society. Public access to LBZ, its precincts and landscape heritage is of greater value to the 'larger public good' today than expansion of individual residential bungalows.



↑ Evolution of LBZ delineation



↑ Possibility of green corridors connecting open spaces in Central Delhi



↑ | Landscape character of LBZ – Rotaries | Tree canopy along avenues

Areas on the periphery of LBZ, such as Kidwai Nagar are being redeveloped to accommodate the growing housing needs for citizens, and at Moti Bagh and others for MPs and bureaucrats, demonstrating the efficacy of planned densification to accommodate development pressures, while simultaneously respecting the landscape character of Central Delhi.

This anomaly, wherein demands for financial benefits supersede human and ecological considerations, tends to undermine the significance of areas such as the LBZ resulting in a fragmented and inequitable urban environment. Any redefinition exercise of the LBZ therefore, needs to be borne out by a critical understanding of the cultural and natural landscape it encompasses. A study of the diverse flora and fauna present, quantity of water recharge, relevance in reducing air pollution and carbon sequestration will meaningfully contribute to the endeavour.

The way forward should balance development pressures, design conservation, and environmental protection, while addressing the needs of a burgeoning population, preserving the identity of the city derived out of its multilayered past. Densification to create public spaces for social, cultural and community uses in these precincts, respecting the cultural and ecological footprint, updating of planting guidelines and exploration of ecological modeling are opportunities that need to be explored further.

LBZ needs to be conserved, not only for its historic planning, but significantly its model landscape planning design; strategic planting; mature, verdant and diverse canopy (which took nearly a century to establish); and, the critical biodiversity it supports. But most of all LBZ offers a hope to still breathe clean air for Delhi citizens.

LBZ's continued protection and/or development must be borne out of a

holistic and long term vision pivoted upon its cultural values of spatial planning, architectural, landscape and environmental heritage.

A city that respects its past, conserves its resources (where else in Delhi does one find hundred year old trees), incorporates the ambience (luxuriant tree canopy) and addresses the wide spectrum of its users is inherently 'smart'. The LBZ debate is crucial at this juncture of city building in India because urban planning is devoid of 'one vision', fragmented into multiple visions and projects that keep morphing into multiple names and faces and facades of a kaleidoscope.

LBZ is inherently significant to the discourse of the future of an Indian city. It is significant for showcasing the historic development of our capital city. It is important for the vast ecological resource it offers. It is relevant for safeguarding the largest, most accessible, and functional open spaces in the city. This offers an



↑ The setting of architectural heritage

opportunity for charting an inclusive future for a city, which is growing into a severely fragmented urbanscape, islands of abundance sitting amidst an expanse of squalor and deprivation. The LBZ offers hope that with a clearer vision and a need to balance multiple aspirations, a solution for this area will be arrived at through consensus, protecting the values that are held dear across society. Till such time as all can sit around the table and discuss the future of their city, the LBZ is best left alone.

References

1. July 2015, Report on the 'Lutyens Bungalow Zone (LBZ) – Boundary and Development Guidelines', DUAC.
2. October 2015, ISOLA (Indian Society of Landscape Architects) Delhi Chapter, Objections and Suggestions.
3. October 2015, INTACH (Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage) Delhi Chapter, A Review.

Photographs courtesy the Authors

ISOLA (Indian Society of Landscape Architects) Delhi Chapter, in the first collaboration of its kind, with INTACH (Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage) and IUDI (Institute of Urban Designers-India), submitted observations and objections to the Ministry of Urban Development in October 2015 highlighting the lack of consideration to the landscape heritage of New Delhi.

ISOLA observations and suggestions include

– The LBZ does not represent built heritage alone. It is an invaluable ecological resource, a green lung for carbon sequestration, for rainwater recharge and a distinct micro-climate which needs protection especially in the context of Delhi's polluted atmosphere.

– It is imperative to first map the existing landscape resources in the LBZ zone and quantify the landscape heritage and its value to the city, both tangible and intangible. The outstanding values must to be preserved, and the quality of open space maintained.

– In the DUAC report, the area of cultural value shown is only the Rajpath corridor, and none of the rest of LBZ. However, the 'Garden City' planning covered a wider footprint both in its plantation and in its axial street design and open space networks.

– A change in land use will adversely impact... important street networks and axes, with multi-use developments (as per MPD) increasing traffic volumes, thereby putting pressure on and compromising the street design and interface.

– Equitable use of open space will not be afforded to the general public through these measures. These are private initiatives that will not only compromise the integrity of the landscape heritage, but will also change the character of Central Delhi.

– Public access to LBZ, its precincts and landscape heritage is of greater value to the 'larger public good' than extension of residential bungalows.

– Detailed mapping of Landscape Resources.

– Quantification of Landscape Heritage (tangible and intangible).

– Understanding the value of this Landscape Heritage.

– Definition of conservation and development norms and safeguarding landscape heritage.

– Recognising and shaping a comprehensive vision for this zone for the future.

– A thorough and detailed inventory and design study to be conducted over 6-8 months for the 'Lutyens Delhi' landscape to document, analyse and create a comprehensive vision for the LBZ landscape heritage and open space networks.

INTACH observations and suggestions include

– 'Modern Day progressive development' means heritage sensitive conservation oriented development. Can we save the 50% (that still retain the bungalow character)?

– LBZ should be recognized as a Heritage Zone and not a 'Development' zone.

– LBZ is a wrong name and it should be 'Lutyens Delhi'. The area of 'Lutyens Delhi' should include all areas shown in the original plan and the area required to protect it.

– No bungalows should be altered, and institutional buildings should not be allowed to follow Master Plan norms if located within LBZ.

– Establish the boundary of the city as designed by Lutyens as the LBZ boundary.

– A detailed study of the different typologies should be carried out if it does not already exist and the architectural features should be maintained as a dictionary of architectural elements in the extreme case where a bungalow does have to be demolished and rebuilt if found structurally unfit for human occupation.

– A thorough study should be carried out to determine current landuse, ownership pattern and state of conservation of buildings.

– No change of landuse should be permitted.