



Summary of the first meeting in the fourth series of T&N Fulham 22nd March 2007

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April 2007

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Present

Marc Dorfman, Chief Planning Officer, LB Redbridge

Paul Evans, Strategic Director of Regeneration, Southwark Council

Pat Hayes, Executive Director of Regeneration and Housing, Ealing Council

Seema Manchanda, Head of Physical Regeneration and Development, Newham Council

Shifa Mustafa, Assistant Director of Planning and Environmental Control, Haringey Council

Dickon Robinson, formerly Director of Development and Technical Services at the Peabody Trust and CABE Commissioner

Robert Scourfield, Interim Director for Culture and Environment, Camden Council

Nicholas Falk, URBED

Anne Wyatt, URBED

Apologies

Andrew Armes, Head of Development and Design, Milton Keynes Council

Chris Donovan, Assistant Director (Strategy, Planning & Regeneration)

David Hennings, Director of Strategic Planning, Haringey Council

Tom Jeffrey, Director of Environment and Leisure, LB Sutton

Brendan Walsh, Director of Regeneration and Community Development, Ealing Council

Camilla Ween, Interim Head of Land Use Planning, Transport for London

The first meeting of the TEN Group's Fourth Series, which focussed on new higher density housing, took place in Fulham. We invited along Dickon Robinson, formerly Director of Development and Technical Services at the Peabody Trust and CABE Commissioner.

Briefing was circulated in advance including the report *Better Neighbourhoods: Making higher densities work* produced by URBED for CABE. In addition, case studies of Beaufort Court and Fulham Island taken from the Building for Life website (www.buildingforlife.org) provided an introduction and description of the schemes, details on the design process and photos.

The Group visited two contrasting housing schemes in Fulham that have both been judged exemplary by CABE. The first scheme Fulham Island was by Manhattan Loft and designed by Piers Gough and the second Beaufort Court on Lillie Road was developed by the Peabody Trust and designed by Feilden Clegg Bradley Architects. TEN is grateful to Richard Oppong, Peabody's Principal Development Manager who

kindly helped organise the visit for us and to Dickon Robinson for taking part in our discussion.

Lessons from Fulham Island and Beaufort Court

Building housing that is both attractive and affordable in London is extremely difficult, particularly as investors have priced first-time buyers out of the market. While this may enable London to succeed as a World City, families are moving ever further out. If the 'bubble' were to burst, it could leave behind schemes that failed to meet long-term needs, and the profusion of small flats in schemes that require high maintenance could be the slums of the future. While planners should be thinking about the bigger picture, in practice the pressures of so many applications results in schemes that are far from optimal. For example Newham is currently approving a thousand units a month, and is setting up a design panel to help. However both schemes illustrated how planners need not only to consider how well schemes fit into their context, but also how well they will meet the needs of occupiers in the short and longer terms.

If we are to improve what we build we need to be building more new suburbs, as well as around town centres, as in Fulham. We also need a better set of principles, not just examples of what is possible. As members would prefer to 'keep the door closed', it is important to find ways of building better. We need processes that can guarantee higher standards like the Victorian railway suburb (or perhaps some of the New Towns). It would be easier to redevelop schemes if they were built in small parts.

Fulham Island - Manhattan Loft

The Manhattan Loft scheme contributed to the street scene through its 'wacky' architecture. However it is not a stable community, with a growing number of short tenancies. In contrast shared ownership, as in Beaufort Court, gives people a stake and ensures they are not sold on. Comments from the group included:

- Fitted well into the context and street scene with a mix of uses
- Bold and modern, and created its own character.
- What was possible in Fulham would not be possible elsewhere
- Good in terms of form and massing, but some members did not like the colours and some of the render was crumbling.
- Used good design principles
- May not be easy to replicate
- Good for the type of person it is aimed at
- Small units means it attracts investors.

Beaufort Court - The Peabody Trust

Beaufort Court, the redevelopment of an old Board School, was generally thought to be not as good as it should have been, even though it catered for a wide mix of households.

It was an example of how compromise between the council and the developer can mean a site does not reach its full potential, and in this case would have benefited from being significantly denser to match the huge hotel next door. It might also have been better if people had been allowed to move in from the adjoining Peabody blocks, rather than coming from the Council's list, which included a significant number of homeless people. Comments from the group included:

- The Peabody block at the front looked good, and fitted well with the adjoining older Peabody blocks
- The public space for the courtyard and the play area seemed wasted (though it did have parking below)
- The kick about area had been a bone of contention as children from outside the development would come and use it and the noise created disturbed other residents (adjustments were later made to the wire fencing to reduce noise)
- The family housing looked as though they had paid too much for the site and was an example of 'how not to do it'
- Would have been nicer if they had an archway entering the development and linking it to the older Peabody development next door (they ran out of money)
- The Planning Officer at the time said "Modern will take longer, as our members don't like it."
- The scheme was actually quite low density.
- Possibly the community facilities should be provided at a neighbourhood level, however this raises questions of territory. Society today has a very low tolerance level of other people's children
- Blinds should be fitted in affordable homes so that those who cannot afford curtains do not stick out.

Response to comments from Dickon Robinson

- The final development was a compromise between the council's planning regulations and Peabody's expectations
- Shared ownership means you can be certain that it is going to be some ones home and not bought by Buy-to-let landlords.
- The group were reacting from the view of townscape, whereas you also needed to judge the buildings by the space they provided. As the Peabody scheme provided large balconies, they were good for people who had to spend a lot of time there. You need to look at a dwelling from the inside out – does it work for the user, particularly when it comes to families.

Management

- The key to successful higher density schemes is good management, and not just design
- While it is taken for granted in the planning stage that management set in place will be there in the future, this can change. For example the kick-about area was planned when Peabody had a site office there, while now they are even removing the resident caretaker.

Density

- What is high density, as it is all relative? The phrase 'high density' can be used as a scare tactic
- Higher densities can work but it becomes harder where there are families, and needs to be linked to the ultimate tenure
- East Thames recommend a child density standard. In the past people have not considered the profile of occupants, whereas in Holland they use the indicator of parents turning up to PTA meetings as a measure of social capital
- There should be fewer standards but they should be set higher.

Planning Process

- Developers doing bog standard development find it easy to slip through the planning process but developers trying to do something different sometimes have a harder time
- Councils can sometimes create failed retail outlets by insisting in having them included on a development when the need is not there and sometimes putting them in the wrong place
- Why is it that the process stops developments from filling their full potential?
- Monolithic design may be the problem, as it is less adaptable to change, and prone to failure.

Follow up actions

- The following have been invited to join TEN:
 - Peter Andrews, Chief Executive, London Thames Gateway Development Corporation
 - Sue Foster, Head of Planning and Land Charges, LB Hackney
 - Emma Peters, Director of Development and Renewal, LB Tower Hamlets
 - Iain Sim, Divisional Director of Urban Regeneration, Croydon Council
 - Jon Whitwell, Assistant Director of Environmental Planning, Hammersmith and Fulham Council

Members have also spoken to them and they have expressed an interest. URBED has followed up, and had a response from Iain Sim who is interested in Croydon rejoining, Sue Foster and Emma Peters, who wants to join.

- The group felt that it would be useful to take stock of the London Plan at one of the meetings. Marc Dorfman promised to produce a summary and distribute it
- Nicholas asked the group if they would be interested in commenting on the GLA Suburbs report.

Future meetings

The next meeting will be held in Tower Hamlets in May, and is likely to include a visit to one of East Thames highly praised housing schemes in Limehouse. We hope that Peter

Bishop will host the third meeting of the series at Design for London's new offices in a building designed by Will Alsop. The study tour to Berlin will be held in September, and suggestions for what we should visit would be welcomed; it is likely to include seeing visiting some examples of 'careful urban renewal' in Kreuzberg, which is a very mixed district next to where the wall ran, as well as looking at the new centre. The sixth meeting will be discussed nearer the time.