



Summary of the sixth meeting in the fourth series of TEN Hackney 18th December 2007

Produced by

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Present

Andrew Armes, Head of Development and Design, Milton Keynes Council
Marc Dorfman, Chief Planning Officer, LB Redbridge
Paul Evans, Strategic Director of Regeneration, Southwark Council
Sue Foster, Head of Planning and Land Charges, LB of Hackney
Jennifer Gavin, Projects Team Manager, LB of Hackney
Pat Hayes, Executive Director of Regeneration and Housing, Ealing Council
David Hennings, Director of Strategic Planning, Haringey Council
Tom Jeffrey, Director of Environment and Leisure, LB Sutton
Seema Manchanda, Head of Physical Regeneration and Development, Newham Council
Shifa Mustafa, Assistant Director of Planning and Environmental Control, Haringey Council
Nicholas Falk, Founding Director, URBED
Anne Wyatt, Administration Manager, URBED

Apologies

Anne Doherty, Assistant Director Planning, LB of Camden
Chris Donovan, Assistant Director (Strategy, Planning & Regeneration), Bexley Council
Colin Lovell, Head of Land Use Planning, Transport for London
Emma Peters, Corporate Director, Development & Renewal, LB of Tower Hamlets
Brendan Walsh, Director of Regeneration and Community Development, Ealing Council
Bob West, Service Manager, Culture and Environment, LB of Camden
Owen Whalley, Head of Major Project Development, LB of Tower Hamlets

The sixth meeting of the TEN Group was held in Hackney and hosted by member Sue Foster and her colleagues in Hackney's Regeneration and Planning Division. We had a very full and informative visit to five new housing schemes, which illustrated different ways of tackling the issues of building at higher qualities and to higher densities. Three were developments of relatively small former industrial sites, and two were comprehensive redevelopments of housing estates. The meeting took in the Woodberry Down site offices of Hackney Homes, and our grateful thanks are extended to Sue and her team and Hackney Homes.

This meeting was also Paul Evans' last TEN meeting as a member as he is retiring from Southwark Council. Paul was one of TEN's original members and will hopefully stay involved with the group.

All the schemes had achieved a mixed community, while being 'tenure blind'. However there was a notable difference between the most recent projects, which were contemporary in design, using modern methods of construction, and paid less attention to the immediate context. Those living in key worker or intermediate housing tend to have different requirements and lifestyles from those living in social housing, who are more likely to be families. They also spend much more time at home. Hence there may be merits in having separate entrances and communal spaces, but a shared public realm and facilities to minimise conflicts but encourage the growth of a sustainable neighbourhood.

Challenges for Hackney

Hackney faces all the challenges of other London boroughs in meeting housing demands, plus a few more:

- As a result of half its housing stock being former GLC estates, it has an exceptional number of residents in disadvantaged circumstances, including large numbers of recent immigrants who speak English as a second language.
- It has lacked connections with the Underground system, but is very close to the City of London, and is made up of many disparate, and in some cases, isolated communities.
- As a result of gentrification and house price inflation, it is tending to house the relatively well-off and the relatively poor, and to lose those in the middle.
- It has lost its old industrial base, creating problems of worklessness and benefit dependency among its residents, plus some issues of gang behaviour among young males.

Blue Hut, Nile Street

The Blue Hut is one of a number of Peabody schemes that broke new ground in using top quality architects, and mixing tenures. The scheme looks very distinctive because of the blue copper covered balconies, which provide everyone with some outdoor space. The scheme provides 178 homes on a tight corner site, with a small internal courtyard which separates the three blocks. 128 of the homes are for key workers or those on lower incomes, and have proved very popular, particularly as it is close to Old Street Station and Moorfields Hospital. Further external space is provided through a roof terrace, and children have access to communal gardens and a youth centre. We were told by a resident that it was marvellous, but that bikes kept getting stolen out of the external bike shed. Such a scheme can not be repeated as there are no longer subsidies for smaller units.

Adelaide Wharf

Adelaide Wharf is a former timber wharf on the canal, where a 0.4 hectare (one acre) site has been turned into 147 residential units plus ten workspaces, giving an overall density of around 300 units to the hectare. Balconies provide external space, and there is a communal garden. The scheme is highly insulated achieving an Eco-homes Excellent

Rating. The scheme is the first of English Partnerships' London Wide Initiative to provide affordable homes, and 50% of the units have been made affordable through an innovative scheme in which residents buy a proportion of their unit, and EP hangs on to the land value element, which should increase in value over time. The management has been taken up by a housing association, and the service charge includes a sinking fund element. Residents pay extra if they want a car parking space, and for extra storage.

Raines Court

Raines Court, which we only saw from the outside, was constructed using Yorkon prefabricated units. It is another Peabody scheme by the same architects as Adelaide Wharf, and looks distinctive, with zinc cladding on the front, and balcony entrances at the rear. Prefabrication does not yet reduce costs, because it is not taking place on a large enough scale. However it does allow greater responsiveness to demand, and higher standards of construction as a result of units being factory built. It is less suited to complex sites, and where land is very expensive. The units have proved popular.

Holly Street

Holly Street has been developed in a number of phases over many years. Most of the residents have been rehoused on site, but at lower densities, as the units replaced unpopular tower blocks, only one of which has been retained. The scheme no longer looks like social housing, but reflects the character of the adjoining Victorian De Beauvoir Estate. The scheme includes extensive community facilities. Much more is now being provided for young people to counter the problems associated with 'gang culture', which are giving the neighbourhood a bad image, despite the quality of the layout and the estate's improved accessibility.

Woodberry Down

Woodberry Down is a huge community-led regeneration project, and one of the two DCLG Mixed Communities National Demonstration Projects in London. It currently comprises nearly 1,500 units, built in fairly regimented large blocks lined up North to South, and largely rented out to Council tenants (though there are some 400 units owned by leaseholders). The scheme has the benefits of a location alongside large lakes and close to Manor House underground station and shops. Planning started in 1999, when a maintenance backlog costed at some £150 million led to the decision to go for redevelopment.

To achieve comprehensive redevelopment, the number of units is being more than doubled, to create a projected population of 10,000, with the rented share dropping from 70% to 30%. The Council drew up a masterplan with the residents to maximise views over the water. Two first class architectural practices have been involved. The social housing enjoys equal shares of the views and having Parker Morris standards plus 10% (which adds about £5,000 to the cost of each unit). Energy will be supplied on site.

The scheme is being developed in phases and will recreate the form of traditional London streets, with squares. It is being managed by Hackney Homes, and the project manager is a former local authority Chief Executive. To achieve the numbers, there will be some very large tower blocks. The first phase is taking place near the lakes, using the space which is most readily available. It is being developed by Berkeley Homes, and the aim is to get going as quickly as possible after the long delays, and a project office has been opened on site with large models. Other phases will be tendered to consortia of developers and housing associations and undertaken over a 20 year period, without need for decanting.

An SRB scheme, which is coming to an end, is being used to provide community facilities including a construction training scheme. There was some chance of the principal blocks being listed, but now the masterplan has been approved by all the relevant parties (though the GLC would have preferred a number of tower blocks and one CHP scheme) to make financing easier.

The scheme is clearly very ambitious, and it is significant that, like Kings Cross, SRB schemes designed to complement the redevelopment have run out by the time construction starts. Some concerns were expressed about whether resident aspirations can ever be met, given not only the time it takes to build and sell private homes, but also the risks of a property downturn, particularly as far as demand for flats is concerned. All is likely to depend on the quality of the first phase, and tackling the underlying social and economic issues that affect current residents.

Fifth series of the TEN Group

It was decided that the TEN Group would continue for a fifth series with a continuing theme of making new housing affordable and sustainable and spreading the benefits of regeneration projects to help tackle worklessness and social exclusion. Finding good examples to see will not be easy and we are still looking for the best places to visit. It would be wonderful if members can suggest schemes particularly from their own patch. The following places were suggested:

- Barking town centre and learning centre
- Hackney's City Academy
- Uxbridge town centre and Stockley Park
- Goldsmiths and Lewisham's creative quarter

The European study tour will be to Belfast and will possibly include Dublin.

Shifa will be moving from Haringey to Waltham Forest in the New Year and we hope she will be able to continue her membership of TEN in her new job.