

BOW MEETING REPORT

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Produced by

URBED

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Special thanks to Scott Sanderson and the team at PRP Architects for their time and effort in preparing an excellent event and also Swan Housing and Paul Canty for attending and allowing us to use their meeting room.

August 2012

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TEN Group

TEN is a small group of primarily senior local government officers in London who have met regularly over eight years to share ideas and exchange knowledge on how to achieve urban renaissance. Using the principle of looking and learning they visit pioneering projects to draw out lessons that can be applied in their own authorities. In the process the members develop their skills as place-makers, and are able to build up the capacity of their authorities to tackle major projects.

Photographs: unless otherwise stated provided by TEN Group members and URBED Ltd

Front cover: Top left - Priestman Point; <http://retrofituk.co.uk/cms>

Middle - Priestman Point; <http://retrofituk.co.uk/cms>

Right - Andrew Mawson at the Bromley by Bow centre;

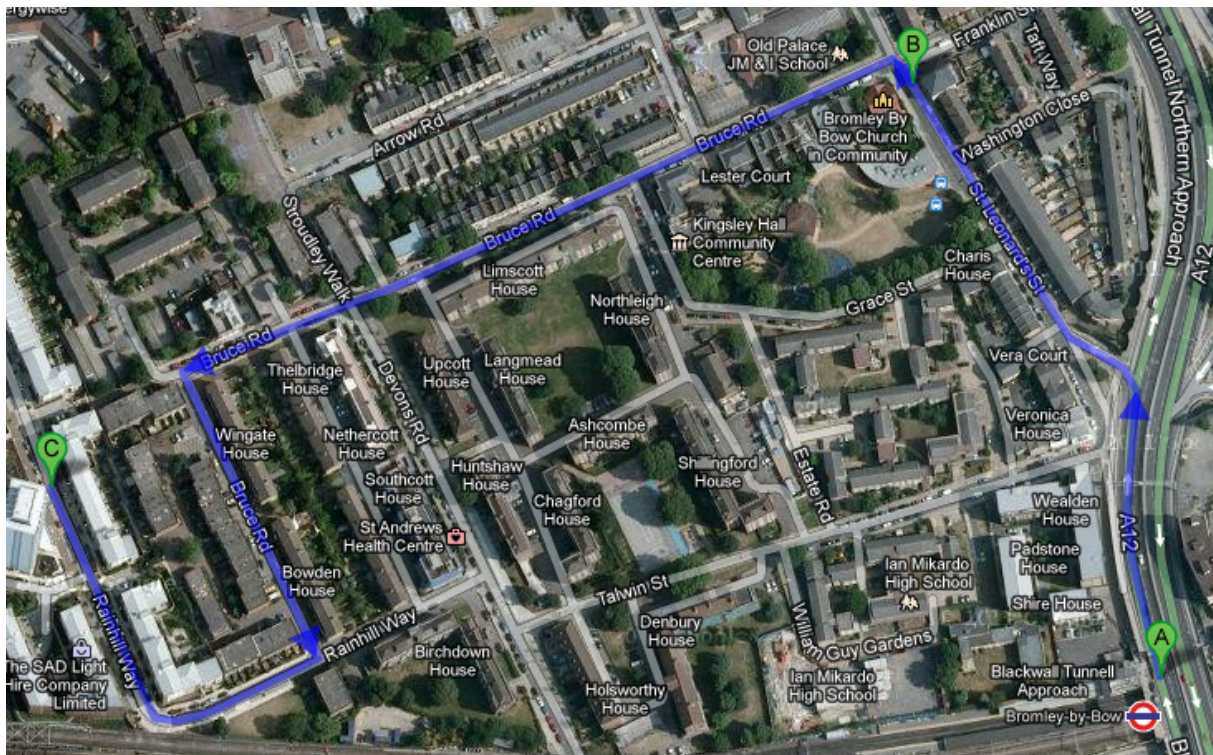
www.guardian.co.uk/society/2008/jan/09/socialenterprises.regeneration

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The Agenda

- 2.00pm Met at Bromley by Bow centre **(B)**
- 2.40pm Met Swan Housing and PRP Architect representatives at Priestman Point for walk around and then Presentations on site **(C)**



The walking route - Google Maps

Introduction - Community regeneration, Bow

The first meeting of the ninth series explored ways of upgrading Council housing estates now that large scale redevelopment schemes are increasingly unlikely to be viable, and focussed on the feasibility of refurbishing existing tower blocks. We were greatly helped by representatives of Swan Housing Association, who have transformed the old Crossways estate in Bow from what was classed as the second worst estate in the country for crime to a really attractive place to live. The masterplanning and design was undertaken by PRP, and we are really grateful to Scott Sanderson and his colleagues for putting so much time into making our visit really useful.

The briefing pack provided information on:

- An impact report on the activities undertaken by the Bromley-by-Bow Centre and a Guardian article which profiles the role Andrew Mawson has played as a 'social entrepreneur'
- A case study from PRP on Priestman Pont, which has won a number of awards
- A summary from a report on how the Community Green Deal could be used to help fund improvements to existing housing aimed at saving energy, and an EPSRC project into the future for retrofitting existing areas.

Neighbourhood regeneration

Bromley-by-Bow adjoins Poplar in Tower Hamlets, and is nowadays a largely residential area. It is only half an hour from Kings Cross by Underground, and is now connected by the Docklands Light Railway, and Crossrail will also run under it. The Council's housing stock has been largely handed over to housing associations, and there have been major improvement programmes. Hence from being a rather isolated part of London's East End it has become a prime area for gentrification, thanks both to better transport links, a greatly improved environment, and measures to improve security.

We began our tour at the Bromley-by-Bow centre, which is a pioneering community enterprise, set up by Andrew Mawson in 1984, starting with an old church. It now includes new blocks incorporating a healthy living centre, one of the first in the country, and business units for start-ups as well as really good café, all overlooking an attractive park. Some hundred people work there, and the centre has helped give Bow a new heart.

We walked through some much improved streets before coming to Bow Cross. Swan Housing Association (originally Basildon Housing) think they probably were selected to develop and run the housing because they were the only bidder to propose renovating the tower blocks, which the local community favoured. The scheme has been undertaken over a ten year period, and is still not completed with the last two town blocks to be converted into social and private housing respectively.



The Bromley-by-Bow centre

Economic viability

Viability overall has been achieved by:

- Building more homes on a tight site, as the number of units has gone from 300, mainly in three 24 storey tower blocks, to 700
- Developing a new street through the estate that rises up to join surrounding roads and connects through to the new DLR station creating an interesting topography
- Building predominantly four storey blocks to re-house tenants moving out of the tower blocks with high quality finishes and landscaping e.g. hedges
- Developing a new high density edge that helped double the number of units, and made the community more cohesive
- Creating several attractive blocks with 93 units with large balconies for private sale on the edge of a Victorian street that runs down to Mile End Road.
- Managing the estate well, with 'probationary tenancies', an estate based caretaker, and communal activities, such as a festival, and lots of play spaces
- Installing a communal underground waste storage system, as in the Netherlands, which makes waste removal much easier
- Commissioning a Combined Heat and Power Plant for 226 new apartments in a higher density block
- Procuring construction through a Design and Build contract (with Countryside supported by PRP) with a higher level of upfront specification than usual which has speeded the process up, and removed some of the risks.



Left: Considerable infrastructure work came at a cost, a huge upfront engineering bill. The road with parking under was necessary to tie the development together and create a flow.



Right: The three towers give the development a density and weight which levels out at the edges of the estate.

Priestman Point has been turned into an attractive place to live from an estate that was notorious for anti-social behaviour, such as throwing television sets out of the upper windows. The 24 storey tower blocks are of concrete crosswall construction with four flats a floor, and reuse was favoured because:

- The flats are quite spacious and once refurbished with new lifts are good places to live
- They offer fine views over London, with useful balconies, and are appropriate in an area that is hemmed in by railway lines and main roads
- Refurbishment saves the costs and dislocation involved in demolition
- Reuse could be made of the existing structure, and district heating system
- Tenants wanted them kept, and some have been able to return to where they once lived, with half of the tenants rehoused in the area.

Energy consumption has been greatly reduced through:

- Insulating the external walls with a silicon based render which is self-cleaning, and which has turned a drab looking building into a landmark, as the contrast with the old blocks highlights
- Installing new double-glazed windows and insulating the communal areas where the wind used to whistle through including future proofing these components (i.e. detailing of the windows means that they can be removed without



*Top and 2nd from top: Communal underground waste storage system has contributed to attractive streets and saves space otherwise taken up by bin storage
 3rd: Level high-porosity tree surrounds reduces maintenance and trips and falls and looks clean and tidy
 Bottom: Safe, green communal play areas*

damaging the render)

- Providing a secure and prominent entrance which connects with a community hall
- Providing individual controls and meters for the heating, this used to be on all the time.

The refurbishment for the 92 units cost £8.5 million, or £92,400 per unit, which is cheaper than demolition and rebuilding, and also allows a much high density.

Community Green Deal

The idea of the Community Green Deal is to finance upgrading existing homes out of the energy savings to be made from improvements, with the funding coming from the energy provider. However this is only likely to be feasible on an estate wide basis of over 750 homes. It could be led by social housing providers, but then draw in private owners once a programme was underway.

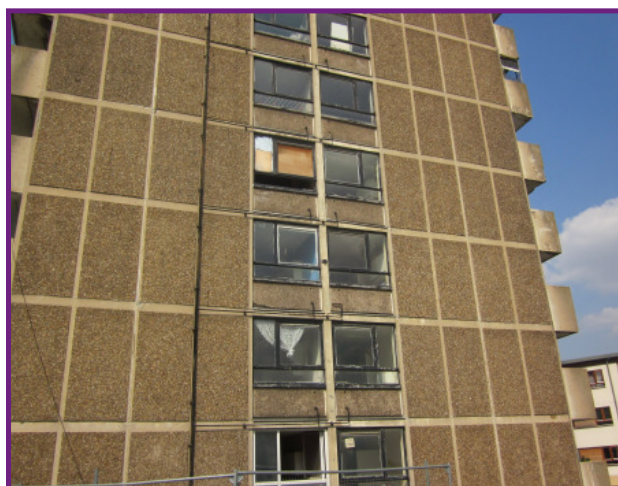
Nearly 7 million homes require improving to meet modern low carbon standards by 2020, so there is much more to be gained from upgrading existing estates than building new homes. Projects such as Priestman Point demonstrate that housing associations can undertake area-based improvement programme through controlling costs, managing complexity, and above all, building up trust.



Regeneration Bow Cross - Building for the future.

Conclusions

Refurbishing existing buildings and working with the community will always seem more complex than overall clearance and starting again. However Bow Cross shows the importance of community stewardship and ongoing management. It also illustrates the value of continuity, using the same contractors and professional team to learn from experience, and then apply the lessons. The scheme has benefitted from a masterplan that reconnected an isolated and stigmatised estate with the surrounding streets, changing the image and culture of the neighbourhood in the process. This required huge investment at the front end in civil engineering with a new concrete box above the DLR (300 columns alone and shorter piles to clear Cross-rail), but the efforts seem to have paid off in the area's popularity as a place to live.



Top: Mallard Point (the final tower block to be refurbished) gives us a picture of what the estate used to be. Run down exterior with dark, oppressive and unsafe spaces at ground floor and walkways overhead

Bottom: Priestman Point with its light and attractive entrance. The space surrounding the block has been opened up to create safe and spacious feeling shared areas

Delegate List

Attendees

Karen Galey | Head of Economic Development | Camden Council

Stephen Tapper | Consultant and Senior Vice President | Planning Officers Society

Mark Lucas | Head of Regeneration | London Borough of Redbridge

Katherine Rodgers | Head of Strategy and Business Planning | Grosvenor Developments

Nicholas Falk | Founding Director | URBED

Jess Bousie | Executive Assistant | URBED

Apologies

Stewart Murray | Chief Planning & Regeneration Officer | Redbridge Council

Ed Watson | Assistant Director Planning & Public Protection | Camden Council

David Hennings | Consultant (Ex Head of Regeneration | Catalyst Housing Group)

Sue Foster | Executive Director of Housing, Regeneration & Environment | Lambeth Council

Marc Dorfman | Assistant Director Planning & Regeneration | Haringey Council

John East | Director of Community Infrastructure | Newham Council

Craig McWilliam | Executive Director | Grosvenor Developments

Tom Titherington | Catalyst Housing Group | Director of Business Development & Marketing

Pat Hayes | Executive Director Regen & Housing | Ealing Council

Mandy Cherrington | Head of Economic Renewal and Business Development | Sutton