



THE VIABILITY OF LARGE HOUSING DEVELOPMENTS:

Learning from Kidbrooke Village

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Our special thanks to John Anderson, Theresa Brewer, Penny Carter of Berkeley for their hospitality and insight into the development.



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TEN Group

TEN is a small group of 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 urban impresarios and 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 - SUDs at Blackheath quarter

Middle - John Anderson shows the group around

Right - Phase 1 housing

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THE VIABILITY OF LARGE HOUSING DEVELOPMENTS: LEARNING FROM KIDBROOKE VILLAGE

REPORT OF THE FINAL MEETING SERIES 09 26 April 2013

The final session in the TEN Group's ninth series focussed on how to make large housing schemes viable, with a visit to the Berkeley Group's redevelopment of the old Ferrier Estate at Kidbrooke in the London Borough of Greenwich. The Group were impressed by the quality of the development, which is bound to win lots of design awards. Thanks to John Anderson, Chairman of the Berkeley Group region leading the development, we also learned a lot about the underlying principles needed to make new housing viable in the current economic circumstances. This report therefore sets out the context, summarises the key features of the development under the five Cs which underlie sustainable urban neighbourhoods, and then concludes with the key essentials for replicating the scheme's success elsewhere. As the Group wants to engage in one more series, they may provide an agenda for future discussions.

Context

Kidbrooke Village is the complete redevelopment of the old Ferrier Estate, which was built by the LCC between 1968 and 1972 on a site where the RAF had built barrage balloons. It was a grey, system built, development of blocks of flats, cut off from the surrounding area, and the 2000 flats were let to people off the housing register. After just over a decade it had become one of the most deprived areas in the country, as jobs vanished, and then started to decay rapidly. Those who could got out and it became known as a 'sink estate' for housing 'problem families'. Greenwich Council, who had taken it over from the GLC, wanted to redevelop the 109 hectares. The council ran a competition and selected the Berkeley Group, as preferred developer. English Partnership also provided £44million of infrastructure funds to aid the viability of the scheme.

Their scheme provided some 4,000 units, twice the existing level, which allowed the reinstatement of all the social housing, plus private housing and equity sharing. The next bid from Crest Nicholson proposed 7,000 units, which would have probably stalled. The Berkeley Group's philosophy is to focus on large, well-located sites in Greater London that can be transformed through imaginative architecture and good urban design into places that appeal to a wide market. Their Vision 2020 Statement is written around building greener (and more economical) homes; delivering sustainable communities; enhancing the customer experience; and running a sustainable business.

Connectivity

The scheme benefits from being next to Kidbrooke Station, which puts the new homes within half an hour of central London. The station is being upgraded as part of the development, and already looks much more welcoming. Just as important, what was an enclosed inward looking estate is being reconnected with the surrounding area. You can walk through to upmarket Blackheath, and also the shops at Lea Green, so the location is intrinsically a valuable one. It also is surrounded by attractive parks. From the start, Berkeley have put in interim landscaping to make the whole scheme very walkable. Furthermore, the masterplan involves four distinct neighbourhoods, which are being developed in phases. As a result, if at any time development stopped, the scheme would still be viable. There are two primary schools and facilities for young people all within walking distance, and the scheme feels safe because there are people around. This includes retaining the main roads

running through the scheme, but raising the surrounding land so that they are no longer a barrier to movement.

Parking, which is often an issue in new developments, is controlled by allowing one space per house and 60% spaces for apartments. Most of the parking is undercroft, which is relatively economic to provide as it does not require expensive ventilation and tanking. Bike parking is provided in secure sheds.



Figure 1: Landscape is reshaped to integrate main road

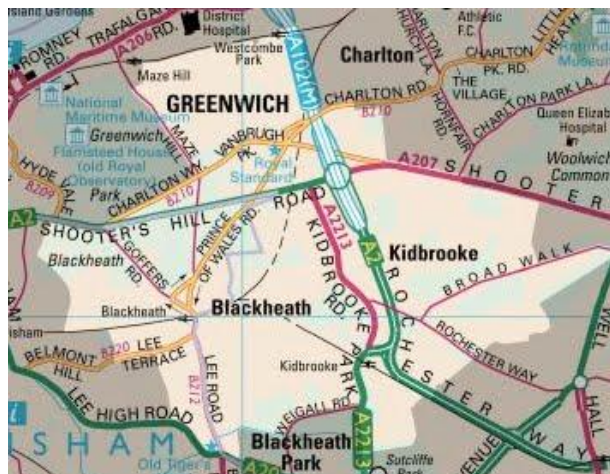


Figure 2: Kidbrooke Village is close to London and upmarket areas such as Blackheath (Left - www.kidbrookekite.co.uk and Right - www.homesandproperty.co.uk)

Community

Whereas the Ferrier Estate was seen as foe one class of people, Kidbrooke Village aims to attract a balanced community. This means providing a range of tenures in blocks that look similar, but which

are clustered rather than pepper-potted. So social housing is next to equity sharing, which is next to private for sale. The previous residents were generally glad to move out, but have been given the right to return, so they have preference in occupying the social housing units, which are being managed by Southern Housing Group.

Social facilities are being provided by community enterprises, and an old RAF building has been restored and given over to a faith based community group to run it. There is also a village hall. Most important of all, existing services were relocated and a new Sainsbury's Local provided, which will eventually move into a new district centre once the population has built up. As a result the housing no longer feels as it is just a dormitory.



Figure 3: Berkeley have supported community enterprises such as the Kidbrooke Village Hall; One Space Youth and Community Centre



Figure 4: The masterplan is flexible (with a Temporary Village Centre)

Berkeley places a great stress on 'social capital' in assessing the sustainability of developments they take on. The maintenance of the estate is being provided by the Group, whose offices are in former leisure centre that has been refurbished. Income from a service charge and ground rent will ensure standards are maintained after the building work is completed. The sense of security is helped by the extensive soft landscaping, and the use of robust materials, and the avoiding of surfaces that would encourage graffiti.

As well as a mix of tenures, there is also a mix of ages across the development, with some elderly living affordable units being provided early on (Phase 2). The scheme also boasts some very large town houses that have been sold for as much as £1 million, which has probably boosted confidence in the scheme as a whole, after a period in which surveyors were wary of putting the full value on the new units.



Figure 5: Some town houses have sold for a million pounds



Figure 6: The housing is clustered but tenure blind

Character

Much of the appeal comes from applying good urban design principles, and as well as architects Lifshutz Davidson the urban designer Jon Rowland was involved as a sub-consultant. (Jon and Nicholas Falk have developed 'ten principles for new suburbs' through a conference in Oxford, which were included with the briefing). Numbers of other distinguished architects have been employed. Blocks have been designed to fit the site, rather than using 'standard house-builders' products.

The most striking innovation is the C blocks, which are four storeys and consist of a mixture of flats and maisonettes with the maisonettes having front doors onto the street. Open space between the blocks is provided over the parking. The apartments look out to the park, with large French doors onto balconies. Blocks in phase 4 designed by Piers Gough feature circular balconies, Scott Brownrigg designed the luxury town houses, and PRP the senior living accommodation.

The interim paths have been blinded with gravel, and there is extensive planting. However the main feature is the large lakes which act as balancing ponds for the Sustainable Urban Drainage System and also feature fountains to aerate the water before it is passed back into the sewers. These are not only attractive to look at but also help with orientation.



Figure 7: Blocks are individually designed by good architects for niche markets such as the elderly



Figure 8: The SUDs scheme with its ponds adds value (the senior living block in the background)



Figure 9: Quality is carefully maintained



Figure 10: The 'C Blocks' offer a new housing model



Figure 11: The existing park is 'stitched in'

Climate proofing

New homes are much more energy efficient than existing ones, and Berkeley expect an annual saving of £380 in heating bills, which is around 25% on average costs. Solar panels are fitted on the sloping roofs of the terraces. The C blocks features district heating, with boilers than use either gas or biomass, and the system is designed so it can be connected up to an 'engine' for the district if that proves economic in due course. Heat exchangers and district heating avoid the need to turn every home into a small power station, and still allow individual control and metering.

Water is saved through taps and appliances, while the waste water is held on site, so that it does not overload the drains. In the process it adds value to the development, as people like to have views of water and greenery.

Waste is stored in wheelie bins kept in small sheds in front of the blocks. The buildings are being constructed in ways that minimise construction waste, and that should ensure they never have to be demolished.



Figure 12: Landscaping is designed to be welcoming and robust seen by the new turf.



Figure 13: Waste is hidden away



Figure 14: Parking is under the landscaping but remains open

Collaboration and Cash Flow

The scheme has been driven by a single master-developer and house builder, working closely with the Council, the Homes and Communities Agency, the GLA and other stakeholders. Berkeley Group were elected in 2006, with Southern Housing taking over the social units. The hybrid masterplan scheme won planning permission in 2009. The recession slowed down housing sales, along with nervousness over whether the scheme would be delivered as planned. Hence grants from the HCA were vital in the early stages. A grant towards the social housing (£65 million) and site works (£43 million) resulted in the buildings of 229 affordable homes by January 2012 and 829 completed or under construction. The grants represents only 10% of the eventual investment in the scheme (put at £1billion), but is much more important in the early stages of getting such a major scheme going.

House prices in South East London are not generally as high as elsewhere, and so it has been vital to create a strong image or brand early on. As their case study says *'The value of the scheme is created by the spaces between buildings – not just by the buildings themselves'*. Achieving good urban design requires collaborative working between the regulatory agencies and planners, who default position is often to say no, and the developer and design team. This has been achieved by having a Steering Group of just four people, which includes key politicians, backed up by officers, and a Stakeholders Group of some 50 representing all the different bodies, including community groups, that have an interest in the outcome. There are also Networks involving particular interests.



Figure 15: The Ferrier estate was turning buyers away and decreasing values so what was going to be phased demolition was changed to complete demolition (i.e.: The development agreement is flexible)

Conclusions

The regeneration case study published by Berkeley Group answers the questions of ‘how do you create a sustainable suburb?’ by stressing:

- A clear sense of identity
- Well considered masterplan that doubles density while only building on 35% of the site
- Good transport links
- Green infrastructure with green fingers coming into the street
- A mixture of housing types and tenures.

Partnerships have been made to work because of:

- An open relationship between the key partners
- Continuity of personnel
- Regular meetings with both design and energy review panels
- A communications group.

Phasing and funding in a financial downturn required:

- Rephasing to provide more affordable homes early on
- A developer with a balance sheet strong enough to handle ups and downs



Figure 16: Contractors agreed not to leave materials on site



Figure 17: Phase 1 on the existing park and football pitch was 50% AH in order to progress estate decant

- High spec affordable housing to help sell the private housing
- Discretion over how infrastructure grants were used (rather than spending it on ‘unnecessary remediation’).

Berkeley hope that the scheme will provide a model for other sites. A contrast has been drawn with Hammarby Sjostad in Stockholm, (which the TEN Group visited a couple of years ago). The development is said to be less technically advanced in terms of environmental technology but more socially advanced. The design inspiration is closer to Accordia in Cambridge or to Richmond Park

As it is impossible to know the future, development is intrinsically risky, and so requires leadership. URBED considers that there is a simple ABC of place-making leadership: Ambition, Brokerage, and Continuity, all of which Kidbrooke Village exemplifies. The Development Timeline in the January 2013 Development Update makes it clear that regeneration takes a generation, over twenty years from reaching an agreement, which far outstrips the vision of most politicians. Hence if we are to build sustainable or living suburbs, we need to adopt different approaches from those that have worked in the past.

No less than £143 million has to be invested in infrastructure on site, which works out at around £30,000 per home, a huge sum if funded through the traditional British approach of relying on developers to put the scheme together. The uncertainties and pay-off period are simply too great to appeal to most private investors, and financial institutions such as pension funds have yet to get engaged. Expecting the private housing to cross-subsidise social housing is unrealistic.

Very few developers are as experienced or put as much effort into learning as the Berkeley Group do, and few with any experience want to face the ordeal that the planning process usually entails. Local authorities have many competing pressures on them, other than building new homes on any scale, and so find it hard to de-risk difficult sites. The public sector no longer has the funds to put in the grants needed to close the gaps or provide the incentives for risk taking. So though we know how to design schemes that are as attractive to look at as any in Europe, we do not yet know how to apply the lessons on any scale.

In the TEN Group’s visits to see how development is managed and funded in other European cities we have learned how the inevitable problems can be resolved or made more manageable. We have seen how a much greater choice of housing is needed to appeal to a wide enough range of markets and to get building fast enough to achieve the necessary economies of scale. We have also seen how a critical mass needed to create viable new communities and accommodate a growing population, which requires more than just infilling the holes in the urban fabric. This calls for:

1. Different approaches to **strategic planning** that link development and infrastructure provision
2. Different approaches to **funding local infrastructure** that channel long-term savings into projects that pay off over 20-30 years
3. Different approaches to development control and **smart construction** that will secure better building and site economies and save on natural resources, like energy and water
4. Different approaches to **housing provision, tenures and management** that speed up occupation and community building, and achieve balanced rather than just mixed communities.

With few realistic prospects of confidence bouncing back, local authorities are going to have to, either individually or in groups, provide the necessary leadership. This requires planners to take on different roles as many members of the TEN Group have started to do. So with enthusiasm being

expressed for a tenth series, there is clearly an agenda of challenges to be investigated and reported on.

Delegate list:

1. Alison Blom-Cooper | Director | Fortismere Associates Limited
2. David Tannahill | Consultant
3. David Hennings | Consultant
4. James Robinson | Senior Development Manager | Grosvenor Developments
5. Jess Bousie | Executive Assistant | URBED
6. John East | Director of Community Infrastructure | LB Newham
7. Katherine Rodgers | Project Director | Grosvenor Developments
8. Marc Dorfman | Assistant Director Planning & Regeneration | Haringey Council
9. Mark Lucas | Chief Planning & Regeneration Officer (Interim) | LB Redbridge
10. Nicholas Falk | Founding Director | URBED
11. Sue Foster | Executive Director Housing and Regeneration | Lambeth Council