



# Sustainable new communities on the South Coast

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#### URBED

26 Store Street  
London WC1E 7BT  
t. 07714979956

e-mail: [j.bousie@urbed.com](mailto:j.bousie@urbed.com)  
website: [www.urbed.coop](http://www.urbed.coop)

This report was written by Dr Nicholas Falk, Founding Director, URBED

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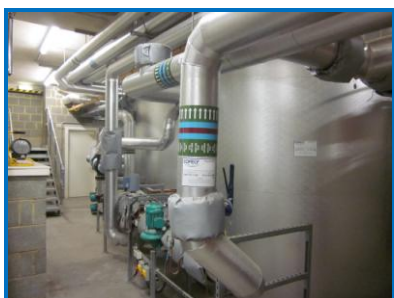
Our special thanks to Chris Gilbert, QED, Pooran Desai, Co-founder, BioRegional, David Ashworth, Director of Regeneration, Galliford Try and Colin Taylor, Regeneco, all of whom made this tour possible

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## Introduction



*Top: The tour started at the Brighton Junction centre*

*2<sup>nd</sup> from top: Roof-top allotments have been very popular at One Brighton*

*3<sup>rd</sup> from top: Biomass boiler*

*Bottom: Recycling facilities and underground bins keep the shared space tidy.*

On October 26<sup>th</sup> as an experiment, the regular meeting of the TEN Group was extended to include a number of other local authorities, and consultants involved with sustainable development. The event was also innovative in visiting two very different developments, both of which sought to achieve the highest standards in terms of saving energy and reducing carbon emissions, and which have been highly praised. One, the New England Quarter, involved the redevelopment of a former railway goods yard alongside Brighton Station on a steeply sloping site near the London Road, a secondary shopping area. The other Graylingwell Park involves the development of a former mental hospital in a beautifully landscaped setting on the edge of Chichester, a small historic city. House prices were relatively high in both locations. Different development approaches were taken from which a number of lessons can be drawn.

The day included a number of presentations, guided tours, and discussions. In the morning session, part of the group was guided around the One Brighton scheme, which was open as part of the Eco Open Houses, Brighton and Hove programme. In the afternoon another group visited one of the completed homes in Graylingwell and spoke to the owner Michael Pickering. We also drew on extensive information made available in the briefing pack, including an assessment of One Brighton by a team at UCL.

We are particularly grateful to Chris Gilbert of QED, who masterminded the development of the New England Quarter, with funding from Sainsbury's, Pooran Desai, co-founder of BioRegional, David Ashworth, Director of Regeneration at Galliford Try (who incorporate Linden Homes, the original developer of Graylingwell, and Colin Taylor, who runs Galliford Try's energy subsidiary Regeneco.

The lessons have been grouped under the questions set out in URBED's report on How Can Local Authorities Build Sustainable Neighbourhoods, starting with the issue of climate proofing and environmental impact, and going on to consider issues of community, connectivity and character. Finally we draw some conclusions for the way forward in reducing risks and raising the value from new housing on large strategic sites.

### Climate Proofing: achieving a positive environmental impact

Any development not only uses scarce resources in its construction, but has a long-term impact on the use of energy, water and waste. Pooran Desai, co-founder of Bio-regional who were responsible for the sustainability measures in One Brighton, argues that we over emphasise the role of new buildings in cutting carbon emissions. The real goal should be 'One Planet Living', which is living within our means. He now believes it is wasteful to aim for Code Level Six rather than Code Level Four, as new building account for a small proportion of carbon emissions. As other measures are equally important, for example the way food is produced and distributed.



*Pooran Desai, Bio-Regional shows the group around One Brighton*

The planning brief and masterplan for the **New England Quarter** sought to reduce carbon emissions through a number of measures

- The 15 acre site had been derelict for a number of decades, and a proposal for building a superstore surrounded by parking with some housing was turned down at appeal, after considerable local opposition
- The eventual masterplan was for a high density scheme with a mix of uses ideally suited to some form of district heating system, as the supermarket and hotels provide a large continuous heat load.
- The plan was to use Combined Heat and Power for the site, but local objections prevented the energy centre being built on a nearby roundabout. However other measures, such as a largely car free development, as the site is next to Brighton Station, were implemented, and there is a successful car club, and a small linear park



- The office block is rated Bream Excellent, and has worked well, except for occupiers not using the air vents properly
- The objective of Zero Carbon was fully taken up in Bio-Regional's scheme for One Brighton, which was designed by Fielden Clegg Bradley and developed with Crest Nicholson. It provides 172 homes, of which 30% are socially rented in a separate block run by Moat Housing.
- Special measures of the Sustainability Strategy include high levels of insulation using locally produced clay blocks, external insulation and triple glazing.
- A biomass boiler backed up by gas provides hot water and heating to all the units, and has been trouble free; it uses wood pellets.
- Consultations led to the provision of 25 roof top allotments, which were taken by the first 50 residents, and have proved a popular community building feature
- On-site waste separation includes food composting, which is used locally.
- The construction team were provided with training and there is a 'green caretaker' to help maintain the ethos
- The theme of saving energy has been taken up in other buildings, such as the Juries Hotel, and Brighton Council have since adopted One Planet policies for the whole district, inspired by what they had seen.
- BioRegional are just starting a full assessment of the environmental impact now the scheme has been occupied for four years.



*One Brighton Eco features include a sedum roof and a small linear park*

**Graylingwell Park** is a former mental hospital site, taken over by English Partnerships and then the Homes and Community Agency, and marketed with a brief for achieving zero carbon performance. The site was sold outright, but at a lower price than would otherwise have been secured, and a number of environmental features were noted:



*The old water tower houses the CHP flues*



*The visitor centre and attractive marketing*

- The attractive visitor centre and the signing along the driveway to the site stress the project's environmental features
- The main carbon savings have been achieved through the use of district heating run by gas (36% of savings), which has been trouble free. The vents are cleverly located in the old water tower
- The homes are tied into securing heat from the local system, and the tariff is set so that residents do not pay more, but do not share in any savings
- Solar tiles have been fitted to over 90 the homes in the first phase, and look good but account for only 2% of the carbon savings, though they do cut energy bills. Other savings are provided off-site in terms of the source of energy
- Homes benefit from not having space given over to central heating boilers, though space is needed for the control unit and heat exchanger
- Use of undeveloped land as allotments encourages healthier living, and helps build a sense of community.



*David Ashworth, Galliford Try explains aspects of Graylingwell Park using a model of the development*



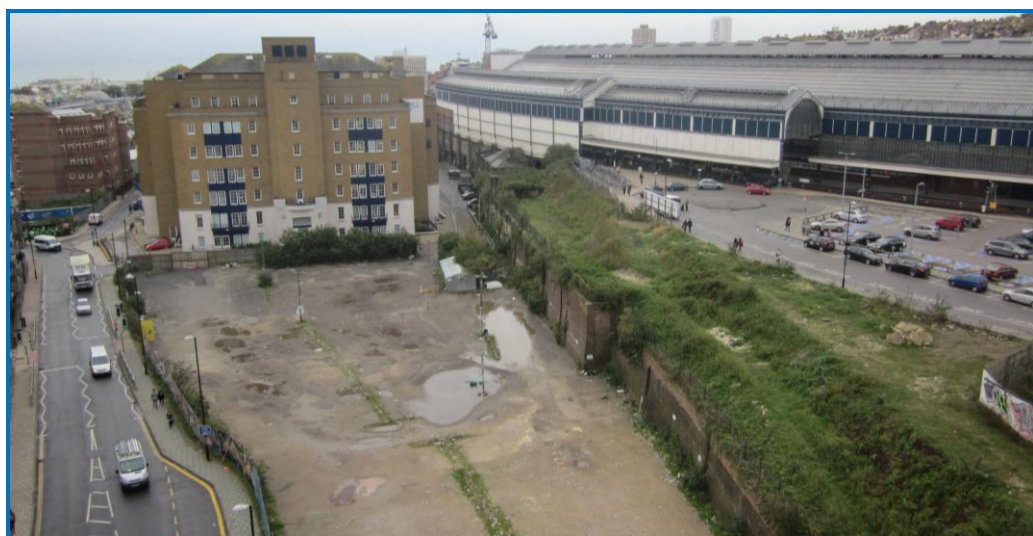
**Discussions of both schemes** led to some tentative conclusions:

1. House buyers do not yet factor the long-term savings from energy saving measures into their purchases, and there is a substantial investment required to provide both the heat engines and the distribution pipes
2. Where these are provided at the start, and by an ESCO the system can be trouble free and economic to run, though there is still very limited experience (the UK only has several hundred completed schemes compared with over 7,000 in Germany, which makes most of the elements)
3. The cost of solar panels has come down greatly, and in the right locations can add to a home's appeal. However even more important is the way the house is built and the quality of construction e.g. no gaps
4. District heating pays off where the densities are high and there is a continuous heat load (for example from a supermarket or school). Combined Heat and Power should offer even more benefits, as there are savings in heat lost through generation and transmission, but is only viable where there is a large development
5. The uncertainties of house sales in the UK increase the risks of having equipment sitting idle and hence add to costs
6. Life styles with regard to energy saving are largely shaped by age, as working families are less likely to be spending time at home, while students have very little involvement in the community as they come and go
7. Providing allotments for growing vegetables and fruit is an excellent way of looking after unused space, and encouraging sustainable lifestyles.

**Community: supporting a better quality of life and integration with the surrounding area**

The **New England Quarter** lies in what historically was a poor part of Brighton, occupied by workers in the locomotive works. The North Laines has since become gentrified by people moving out of London, many seeking alternative life styles in the 'green' movement. It also adjoins the London Road, a local shopping centre.

- The proposals for building a large food store quite close to quirky small shops aroused huge local opposition, which was only overcome by the Council approving a planning brief drawn up by a working party representing different interests.



*The 40 storey mixed hotel and apartment tower went bankrupt, leaving a visible part of the site looking uncared for*

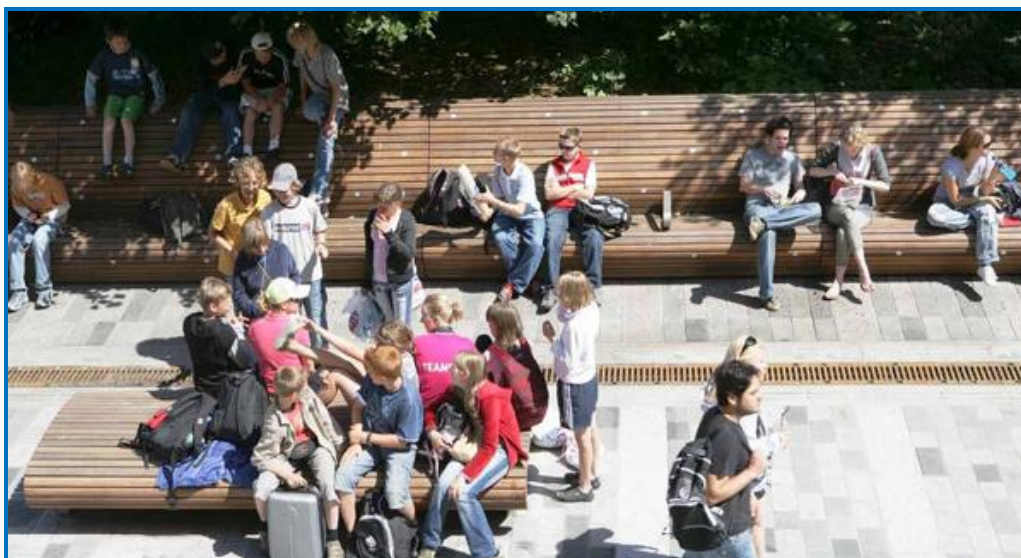
- The masterplan is designed to link the station and the supermarket directly by foot with the London Road. However the development of the block by the station was delayed when the developer of a 40 storey mixed hotel and apartment tower went bankrupt, leaving a visible part of the site looking uncared for
- The plan divides the site into some ten blocks, and these have been built out by different developer and architect teams; the switch from the forward planning unit to development control has led to criticisms of inflexibility.
- The new housing has proved very popular, and was quickly occupied. Many of the homes for sale were bought by 'buy to let' investors, and rented out to students.
- A major language school which prepares foreign students for university took part of the site, and also occupies part of the office block (along with an electronic games design firm)
- The open spaces are well-used and the quarter feels safe and busy most of the time
- The Sainsbury's has not taken trade from London Road, which has recovered well, partly helped by a Town Centre Manager funded under the Section 106 agreement.



*The tour group also looked at the Jubilee Library, which since its opening in 2005, has won 14 awards.*



*Sainsbury's was a key player in the development and success of NEQ*



*Some of the tour group also visited nearby New Road, a shared space scheme by Gehl Architects and Stockley opened in 2007. Illustration: Stockley*

**Graylingwell Park** lies on the edge of Chichester, and along with the neighbouring defence establishment was largely unknown to local people. A well-organised consultation process secured active support for the plans for a large housing scheme, and its innovative features. The Council played a positive enabling role with excellent working relationships

- The first phase has included a higher than average proportion of social housing, let by Affinity Sutton, as these proved easier to fund. Many have been taken by families
- The homes for sale at first went well, and many appealed to older households down-sizing or retiring from London
- The financial crisis and general air of uncertainty have hurt sales, as buyers hang on to see what else is available
- The limits on car parking (one per unit) are thought to affect sales, as it needs two incomes to service a mortgage, and the location makes driving to work inevitable
- The next phase refurbishes and reuses a considerable number of the existing buildings
- The open space and other facilities are being run by a Community Development Trust, as in a previous scheme at Caterham Barracks, and run by trustees appointed by the developer.
- Some problems have occurred through cars speeding
- Different lifestyles of families in social housing and owner occupied directly opposite each other, has created tensions



*Community gardens and orchard bring residents together*

**Discussions highlighted:**

1. The involvement of a good housing association is key (as is the allocation policy)
2. The difficulties of building up a balanced neighbourhood when homes are sold and then rented out; this may lead to 'mono-cultural communities'
3. The value of facilities that bring people together, and the problems of maintaining open space to a high standard
4. Residents need to be represented somehow on the body that manages the common parts.



## Connectivity: encouraging walking and cycling and reducing the use of private cars

The **New England Quarter** is unusual in the low provision of parking, which has worked because of its specific location and context:

- The car free streets and closes are attractive and busy, and unusually the entrance to the supermarket is a popular square
- Links through to the shopping street have worked well, though the steep site means either climbing up lots of stairs or taking circuitous routes with traffic on them
- The car parking for the supermarket (132 spaces) is rarely more than half used
- The surface level station car park had to be replaced at the start by a multi-storey structure, and a new access road (funded by the sale of part of the site to a supermarket)
- Maintenance has proved a problem, for example regarding tree pits, and the linear park suffers from having been handed over to the Council.

**Graylingwell Park** feels very quiet, as people only come and go on their way to and from work

- Much of the parking is unobtrusive in courts
- Allocated spaces seem to take up a lot of space
- The open spaces all seem very well maintained
- There is little obvious provision for cycling, though safe routes are being created
- A small bus has been provided, but is little used



*Too much space seems given over to cars*

### Discussion highlighted:

- In a place like Chichester almost everyone drives to work, and the roads are busy because many can no longer afford to live close to where they work
- Attracting older people to live a long way from shops and services could be difficult
- The value of mixed uses in generating activity at different times

## Character: appealing to different markets

The **New England Quarter** benefits from its high density, and from involving a variety of architects within an overall design code, and can look outstanding when the sun shines!

- The predominant colour is white, and some of the surfaces are weathering badly, with render falling off the Barratts block
- The quarter as a whole has a distinctive contemporary character, which goes well with the rather prosaic adjoining blocks
- Some elements, such as One Brighton, have won design awards, and look extremely attractive
- The public arts is interesting and helps explain the site's history
- There are many interesting vistas, and the views from higher up are memorable.



*The predominant colour at NEQ is white which looks bland against a grey sky*



*A variety of terraced houses at Graylingwell Park are attractive from the street and also extremely spacious inside.*

**Graylingwell Park** succeeds in creating a very different look from the conventional suburban housing estate, with some interesting views

- The overall setting is magnificent, with huge green open spaces and woods
- The terraced houses are attractively grouped, with some innovative designs
- The front gardens, particularly those with 'edible' fruit trees are really appealing
- However the look is spoilt by the wide streets and pavements (the result apparently of local consultations)
- As a result of both the roads and care with solar orientation many homes seem to suffer from having insufficient gardens
- Choices will widen as the next phases are built, as the scheme is currently only a quarter complete

The discussion suggested a general preference for living at Graylingwell, with some criticisms

## General conclusions

The visits were highly appreciated for enabling comparisons to be made of very different approaches to building new housing, and for enabling visitors to get beneath the skin of what they saw. A number of policy conclusions could be drawn:

1. Sites on the scale of both the New England Quarter and Graylingwell Park enable innovation and the creation of a sense of place. They are vital to making new housing more attractive and affordable (at present only 25% of home buyers consider a new home according to the RIBA's report Future Homes)
2. The upfront costs involved in developing plans and overcoming the many hurdles will no longer be born without landowners and local authorities playing a positive and enabling role. In particular we need to improve the process of going from masterplans to delivery, perhaps through more flexible development frameworks?)
3. Some of the opposition might be reduced through better information on how schemes perform in practice, as most of the figures regarding say energy consumption or car use still seem rather theoretical. In particular we need to carefully assess the costs and impact of different features or standards
4. Demonstration projects such as these can help set better standards and shift attitudes, but they would benefit from being properly evaluated from the consumers' point of view (and not just by designers)
5. Ongoing management or stewardship after the original developer leaves is vital. Ways must be found of engaging with new residents and funding the ongoing costs without imposing excessive service charges
6. Looking and learning from study tours such as this is a good way of sharing good practice, and hopefully speeding up implementation.

## Delegates

*Andy Sharpe | Senior Project Manager | Grosvenor*

*Bonnie Kwok | Urban Design team | South Cambridgeshire*

*Chris Gilbert | QED Estates Limited*

*Darren Richards | Head of Planning and Transportation | RBK Kingston*

*David Brimmer | Senior Technical Director | WSP*

*David Hennings | Consultant*

*David Tannahill | Consultant*

*Jess Bousie | Executive Assistant | URBED*

*John | Templeton | Vice Chairman | Chichester Society*

*John East | Director Community Infrastructure | London Borough of Newham*

*Liz Kessler | Winchester*

*Lucy Taylor | Director of Regeneration and Planning Policy | Ealing Council*

*Mark Jaggard | Spatial and Economic Development Manager | Oxford City Council*

*Nicolas Falk | Founding Director | URBED*

*Richard Burton | Director | Terrance O'Rourke*

*Simon Machen | Head of Planning Transport & Engineering | Peterborough City Council*

*Stewart Murray | Assistant Director - Planning | Greater London Authority*

*Tom Hyde | Technical consultant | BRE Global*

*Tony Jones | City Growth & Development Coordinator | Norwich City Council*