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Creating Streets in Lambeth

The regeneration at Myatt's Field North is to be welcomed says *Flora Neville* but wonders if the process could have been differently managed with even better results

Estate regeneration throughout the borough of Lambeth is in full swing. Traditional terraced houses back on to post-war council estates creating something of an identity crisis. Local protests and accusations of 'Gentrification' are not uncommon.



It's goodbye to 1970s bricks and hello to 2015 bricks at Myatt's Field North

Myatt's Field North, or Oval Quarter as it is being called in estate agents' publicity and posters, is one of the several estates that is being reworked from the foundations up. The previous poky, maze like structure has been opened out into a fairly traditional street pattern, and the new buildings, are nondescript, but solid and discreet.

This is the work in progress of a private finance initiative made up of Regenter and their partners Higgins Construction, Rydon Maintenance, Pinnacle PSG, E.ON and PRP architects. It is a 25 year project.

Previously, Myatt's Field was, say some, one of the 'rougher' council estates in the area. It is hard to believe that now. Though only mid regeneration, it looks more like the genteel surrounding streets than another isolated mass of post-war utopian housing.

This was one of the principal aims, says PRP architect Richard Harvey. 'We wanted to create what felt not like another estate, but a series of streets.' They aimed to do so by creating 'character zones', - buildings that, 'reference the architectural language of the individual area they were joining,' through the colour of the bricks, the height of the blocks, and the style. It was about 'place-making', says Harvey, and giving the estate a renewed sense of identity, 'legibility, and streets in which you could recognise where you were.'

It is generally acknowledged that the estate was in need of change. Myatt's Field was notorious among the police, local authorities and residents as a 'hot bed' for crime. It wasn't necessarily crime from within though. The maze-like complex, the blind corners, narrow alleyways and external stair cases, made it an ideal hiding place for some of the gangs in the local area.

Trees were scarred with bite marks from dogs that were trained to hang by their teeth to the boughs. It was known as 'The Dads' in reference to Baghdad, because mounds of rubble - demolished Victorian houses for the poor, that Harvey says would be worth a fortune now - were heaped up across the grassland as in a war zone.

However exaggerated these claims may be, even the most resistant of residents to the redevelopment agree that the area needed changing.

Yet, there is resistance to the scheme. As is the case with several South London estates, there is some strong objection from the residents to the perceived gentrification of what has long been their homes and their communities.

Lambeth council representative, Jo Phillips also admits that Lambeth Living have a mixed reputation for dealing with complaints. Maybe that frustration feeds concerns. As I walk around the estate with Jo Phillips and Regenter Chairman (and Pinnacle Corporate Development director) Andrew Saunders, we are hauled into a property by some very frustrated and longstanding leaseholders.

They are gathered round a sewage leak in the kitchen, there are flies everywhere, and scaffolding towering over her back yard. The complaints turn quickly from the sewage leak to how the residents have been 'hoodwinked' all along.

The agreements from the consultations, 'have been changed' according to the resident of the property we are in. 'We've been lied to, buildings are higher than what they agreed, they're blocking out our light,' says another.

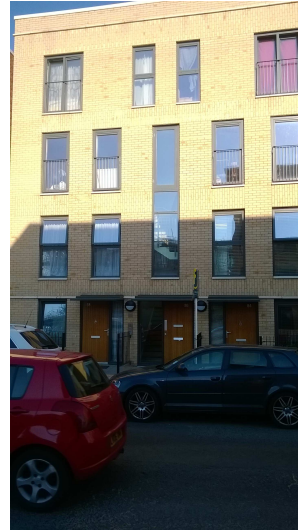
Andrew Saunders explains to the women that a change in plans without consultation would be illegal, and that the schemes were pinned up all around the estate for residents to see, to which one of the women in the kitchen replies, 'If you don't know anything about planning how can you possibly know what the plans mean?'

This is a crucial point, and is perhaps at the crux of resident dissatisfaction with housing redevelopment. These residents implied that the plans for the scheme have been made despite them, rather than through them and with them. There is no doubt that there has been 'consultation' all along, but 'consultation' is an ambiguous word.

Create Streets advocates co-design not consultation. Often these kick off with what is known as enquiry by design or *Charettes* - meetings lasting several days where all the stakeholders, including a significantly representative proportion of residents, sit down together and work out a plan that everyone can understand and be a part of. Might this approach have worked better here and left more residents satisfied?

Interactive 'consultation' would certainly leave no one in any uncertainty regarding the plans. They would lay out how these plans will look throughout the redevelopment as well as on completion. Critically, the plans themselves are also designed through interaction and inclusion. A process that involved the community more might well have designed streets that look a little less 'flat.'

The sewage problem was related to a nappy flushed down the loo, and it was immediately dealt with and paid for by Higgins. But the antagonism between these residents and the estate managers implies a lack of thorough interactivity between the two parties.



Streets of flats above maisonettes and apartment blocks in Lambeth – the apartment blocks would need lifts under proposed changes to the London Plan.

That said, the residential dissatisfaction I witnessed is not representative of widespread antipathy. Though any leaseholders deciding to move away receive open market value plus 10% on the price of their home, only 6% of residents have left their properties as a result of the project. This percentage includes absent landlords and death from old age. Even in the mists of anger, the resident with the sewage leak admits, 'It is safer and we are mixing more with each other now.' That sounds like a thumbs up on the end product whatever resentments there have been *en route*.

Perhaps this is because all the properties are 'tenure blind,' meaning you cannot tell from the outside which are affordable homes and which are private, and the two are completely 'pepper-potted', says Richard Harvey. Which, according to Regenter and Pinnacle is precisely the point.

'We fervently believe,' Andrew Saunders emphasises, 'that improving the environment in which people live, giving them an area to be more proud of as well as by mixing tenure types delivers a thriving community with significantly reduced social issues.'

A nearby residents echoes this. 'Three years ago', he says, 'you frankly didn't come this way. You might drive round the side of it but you did so with the windows locked. I'd walk through it now without a second thought. It looks nice too.'

Of the 477 original properties, 305 have been pulled down and rebuilt. 247 of this number were tenanted and 58 were leasehold. All 247 tenanted properties are being re-provided and all 58 leasehold properties are being swapped on a like for like basis.

The project is providing 146 new shared ownership properties and 357 new properties for sale. The scheme will therefore double the density of housing and increase the amount of affordable homes. The properties have roof terraces, inset balconies and private gardens for both affordable and private properties. As an aside the medium rise mansion blocks and flats above maisonettes which make up nearly all of the development would be much harder to build cost-efficiently under proposed changes to the London Plan (more lifts). This should be a clear change of policy for the next mayor.

The plans for the park land look promising. There are various courts, playgrounds, an orchard and allotments. There is a fairly obsolete community centre, though Richard Harvey says its point is more to facilitate the community than artificially galvanise a sense of togetherness. And Pinnacle insist it has had a 'fantastic reception' and will be fully used.

Let's hope they're right. Certainly, their offices are there, so if a resident has a fish to fry they can take it directly to the management team rather than telephone.



The community centre (like so many) would appear to sit pointlessly empty much of the time. It is also oddly ugly. Pure glass, it looks best when reflecting the surrounding streets (as here).

Create Streets has seven 'tests' for assessing estate regeneration. We have not independently verified information but the scheme would appear to pass all or nearly all of them.

Regeneration appears to pass most tests

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Myatts' Fields North regeneration proposals

1. Does it have support of residents?	YES	▪ Though there is some discord survey with 36% response rate showed 73% agreement that regeneration has improved lives of residents
2. Does it have support of neighbours?	Probably	▪ Credible anecdotal evidence that nearby residents prefer new scheme but impossible to be certain
3. Does it increase total housing?	YES	▪ Yes from 477 to 980 (a 105% increase)
4. Does it at least keep social housing equal & treat leaseholders fairly?	YES	▪ All tenanted homes reported re-provided on similar terms ▪ All leaseholders swapped on like for like basis. Option to receive Open Market Value plus 10% if chose to move
5. Is new spatial layout better and does it 'plug into' streets and city?	YES	▪ Yes. Proper streets though not always proper blocks ▪ Buildings meant to reflect neighbouring streets and to some extent do
6. Are new internal standards better and good enough?	Probably	▪ Same independent survey says that 80% of residents in new properties agree that overall their accommodation is better than two years ago
7. Does it produce mixed community by tenure and use?	YES	▪ There is a social mix in the new development ▪ There could and should be more mixed uses (shops & commercial)

Source: Pinnacle Group. NB: We have not independently verified data

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We have not independently verified but the regeneration appears to pass all or nearly of our seven tests

The data is imperfect but it appears to have the support of neighbours and residents, as the 6% move-away rate implies. It increases the housing tally from 477 to 980 (a 105% increase), and has retained the number of social built houses. It's spatial layout is hugely improved and the architects have deliberately plugged into the surrounding buildings.

Internal standards of homes are, we are told, improved and the majority of properties, including social housing, have a private patch of outside turf. With a doubling of homes, there is a large admixture of market housing into a previously near 100 per cent social housing development. Though it is physically, 'tenure blind.'. There are some shops (perhaps there could be more?), no apparent commercial space.

There is a real sense of community here; a dropping in culture where residents seem comfortable and sociable and sit outside their properties in the sun. It seems that peace is only *really* disturbed by the screeching and grinding of building works. But that will fade away, once all the streets have been created.

Flora Neville is a journalist. She is interested in the marginalization of communities; why that happens, the effects it has, and how that can be addressed through better housing and streets. She is writing a series of features on estate regeneration for Create Streets.