

SOUTH ACTON MASTERPLAN

HTA's masterplan enables the delivery of fast paced regeneration in Ealing, London



BACKGROUND

Developer Countryside and L&Q housing association with HTA Design LLP and Alison Brooks Architects (ABA) won a competition in 2010 to deliver the regeneration of the South Acton Estate for Ealing Council. HTA's masterplan provided a framework for the redevelopment of the estate, covering an area of approximately 21 hectares. The 15-year regeneration programme includes 2,350 homes, half of which will be affordable and over a quarter will be family housing, as well as retail and community facilities, along with new and improved areas of public open space. A strategically important scheme for Ealing Council, the key objective was to help to deliver transformative change to the area, to attract a diverse range of new residents whilst fulfilling the needs of existing ones.

Phase 1 of the new regeneration

scheme, designed by HTA, was granted planning permission in 2011 and is now complete on site. Following eleven months of work, the team went on to submit a dual planning application in February 2012, consisting of an Outline Planning Application with a Design Code, prepared by HTA, and a detailed application for Phase 2, prepared by ABA. The process involved extensive community consultation and working in close partnership with officers from Ealing Council, the GLA and TfL. Permission for both applications was granted in September 2012 and ABA's Phase 2 is currently under construction. Phase 3, consisting of two sites that have been designed by Stitch and Maccreanor Lavington, has been granted detailed planning permission, with work on site due to commence this autumn. HTA's

masterplan and Design Code created a sound platform from which each phase could be designed with differing but complementary architectural styles by separate practices, to create a new environment that exudes a sense of place and architectural quality.

Prior to the regeneration, the estate's 2000 homes in medium to high rise blocks were characterised by a feeling of isolation and suffered from a lack of connections with the surrounding residential areas. Randomly arranged large blocks sited in a poorly defined landscape contributed to an unclear street structure and an incoherent public realm with poor natural surveillance.

The objective of the masterplan was to provide a holistic redevelopment of the estate, whilst retaining and enhancing the strong sense of community within the area. The principles of the masterplan were:

- Stitching the site back into the wider Acton area
- Improving north-south connections through the estate
- Re-establishing a well connected street grid
- Creating a network of open spaces
- Responding to context and scale
- Reinforcing character.

The townscape strategy was to provide a framework, sensitive to location, integrating the neighbourhood back into the surrounding residential areas, and that could also still evolve. This aspiration has been achieved through:

- The block structure that creates new or improved connections to the surrounding streets
- The building heights that respond to adjacent existing buildings, create continuity and variety where necessary, and announce the development with two taller buildings at key gateways into the new development in the north and west
- Buildings that frame the street and create strong frontages along key routes
- Existing trees and new tree planting aiding legibility through the masterplan, creating landmarks and site features with a strong sense of identity.

FAST PACED ESTATE REGENERATION

A multi-disciplinary team including

urban designers, architects, landscape architects, planners, arboriculturalists, transport and infrastructure consultants, and the client worked closely together to produce a deliverable masterplan. During the design process the masterplan team reviewed and tested various options, consulted with the local community and met with the local planning authority.

The role of the local authority within this process cannot be overemphasised. From the outset, officers from the Planning Department within Ealing attended regular meetings and workshops, effectively becoming an equal voice within the design team. This relationship meant that issues could be discussed and dealt with in a timely and pragmatic fashion as they arose, thus reducing risk and curtailing what can become protracted months of negotiation if a sense of trust is not shared.

The in-depth and comprehensive stakeholder engagement programme that was established also played a very significant role in the success of the process. Regular sessions were held with a core group of residents, throughout the development of the masterplan, and the team made every effort to identify and meet all the major local stakeholders, often making changes to the proposals to reflect issues of concern for them. These efforts minimised the level of local objections at planning committee and helped to ensure a unanimous positive decision by members.

CONTRIBUTION TO URBAN DESIGN PRACTICE

The project is at the forefront of estate regeneration. Tackling the pertinent and in some cases controversial issues involved in the regeneration of estates and buildings which are often less than fifty years old. The nature of housing development in the UK today necessitates significantly increasing the number of homes to fund the regeneration. This presents challenges in terms of designing for higher density development within a lower rise suburban context, redeveloping the estate as a perimeter block development in place of 'buildings in space'. The masterplan demonstrates how the phased delivery of redevelopment can reinstate a more coherent block structure, with careful and sensitive massing, whilst increasing the density of development



← HTA Masterplan
 ↖ Urban design diagrams showing: Character Areas; Context/Scale; Green Network; Formation of a central space; North and south routes
 ↗ Cheltenham Gardens - to the north of the site
 ↑ Completed Phase 1
 → Townscape



overall. This was achieved while ensuring that existing residents could be decanted directly into new phases without the need to move away and return.

LESSONS LEARNED

Each phase of the masterplan delivered so far has benefitted from a complementary but different architectural style, designed within guidelines and parameters established by HTA's masterplan. This diversity is delivering interest and variety within the area, whilst providing best practice design solutions for urban environments such as front doors onto the street, good overlooking, plenty of public and private amenity space, a range of unit types and tenures and homes that enjoy

great views. The masterplan demonstrates a model approach for delivering long term regeneration in difficult and challenging market conditions and delivers exemplary community and stakeholder engagement. Where possible, mature existing trees have been maintained within the streetscape. Buildings have been designed around them to maintain a green and established feel to the neighbourhood. These can be perceived as new buildings, set within a mature, attractive, existing environment, rather than a new estate. A strong ownership and commitment to the project by the client and the team has helped to drive it forward. The masterplan is delivering much needed new homes to London at a phenomenal pace. ●

ST CLEMENT'S HOSPITAL, BOW

John Thompson and Partners design London's first Community Land Trust for a new community



St Clement's Hospital is a former workhouse infirmary in East London. The 4.5 acre site, with 19 buildings of varying age and quality, has been derelict for nearly ten years. In 2012, the Mayor of London decided to establish London's first ever Community Land Trust (CLT) at St Clement's. The CLT will oversee the management of the site on completion, ensuring that 35 per cent of the housing will be affordable for posterity. Linden Homes, with John Thompson and Partners (JTP) as architect and masterplanner, were selected as the GLAs Development Partner for the project.

COMMUNITY PLANNING

Community planning workshops were held over two days, attracting 350 local people who were given the opportunity to help develop design solutions. The workshops revealed that the local area not only suffers from poor community integration, but also lacks a focus and a meeting point for people to come together. The main aspiration was to see improved connectivity into and through the site. The visioning workshops also revealed the strong emotional connection to St Clement's Hospital as a local landmark. The workshops were an important first

step and opened up a continuous dialogue with the local community.

OUR APPROACH

Our approach to this unique site has been to respond to the community's desire to see it become a vibrant, active and accessible environment. The resulting masterplan proposes to open up the former walled hospital to the local community for the first time. The listed buildings on the site will be refurbished to a high standard, and further enhancements will be made to create new spaces. The development will provide 252 new residential dwellings, of which 73 are in the restored historic buildings.

THE MASTERPLAN

The masterplan proposals are guided by a number of key principles which were developed through workshops, then tested and refined in the design development period that followed. The masterplan can be seen as a series of linked and interconnected character areas.

A NEW FRONT DOOR

A new public frontage to the development which addresses Mile End Road opens up the site to the public. A rich mix of

commercial and community uses within the John Denham and Bungalow Buildings provide an active entrance to the site. Two arches in the Bungalow are cut open giving pedestrian access to the residential development beyond. The boundary walls are lowered at key points to improve visual connections between the site and its immediate context.

THE PAVEMENT

The Pavement is a key north-south route through the development which connects Mile End Road with Cemetery Park. It is a shared surface route that provides a direct physical and visual connection through the entire length of the site. A series of 'play along the way' natural spaces adjacent to the route provide points of interest and amenity. These include opportunities for public art, seating and gathering.

COURTYARD GARDENS

Courtyard gardens, and a new residential building, reinforce the central axis of the original workhouse. This provides an active frontage onto The Pavement and a boundary frontage onto British Street and the Eastern border. In form, this building has contextual resonances of the historic North Block and Administration Building.

SOUTHERN QUARTER

The existing walled therapeutic garden is retained and enhanced. A new southern entrance provides natural surveillance of Hamlets Way and Cemetery Gardens by opening up the southern boundary and lowering the boundary walls. A new taller residential building set back from the wall provides a strong visual focus at the new southern entry.

The heritage of the site has played a significant role at St Clement's with ten conservation principles informing the masterplan. These include: respecting the orthogonal symmetrical plan and site's central spine; accessing the site in ways that minimise impact on the listed boundary wall; maintaining existing circulation patterns; and recognising the essential organising principles of the original hospital layout.

OPEN AND PUBLIC SPACE

The landscape strategy for St. Clement's responds to the tight urban nature of the site. The Pavement will be reinforced with a line of trees, hedging and shrub planting.

View south along new shared surface connecting Mile End Road to Cemetery Park.



A series of open spaces divides the north-south route. A new south facing square is located behind the John Denham building. It will be animated with two water features either side of the steps, designed to create a simple and attractive focal point at the square's edge.

Private communal areas of open space are located off this green spine in an east-west direction and set amongst the buildings. The character of these spaces is varied to create diversity and interest. A series of play areas have been dispersed across the public open space. Pocket community allotments and kitchen gardens with espalier fruit trees and hedging will encourage food production and community cohesion. A SUDs strategy incorporates large cellular underground storage tanks within the areas of open space for the disposal of surface water. Around 2,295 sqm of green roofs on the

new buildings will also provide a natural drainage strategy to reduce the water run off and encourage biodiversity.

DELIVERY

The project has received detailed planning consent with unanimous approval by the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. Prior to the commencement of construction the site has hosted some memorable events, including the extremely popular Shuffle Summer and Winter Festivals, with art installations, outdoor cinema including Q&A with Danny Boyle, pop-up bar, cafe and shops.

The project is now on site. Asbestos removal from the existing buildings is a first priority to prepare them for refurbishment. The construction will in a single stage, provide housing for sale by Linden Homes, homes for rent for Peabody and affordable housing for shared

ownership for East London Community Land Trust.

LESSONS LEARNED

There have been three key drivers for the masterplan: the aspirations of the political organisations involved in the project; the development partner; and the local community. The challenge has been to carefully understand what these aspirations are, and to work with all three in unison to come to a mutual understanding and agreement for a way forward. It is a very sensitive site, and proposals have had a strong emotional resonance for different reasons. This meant that there were considerable benefits in engaging fully and openly at all stages. JTP's role has been to facilitate this process and deliver a scheme that has gained wide approval. ●

View of Market Square
View through site entrance at Mile End Road through Bungalow building
3D sketch perspective
Proposed masterplan - ground floor
Section through site along The Pavement



KEY

Public Realm & Access

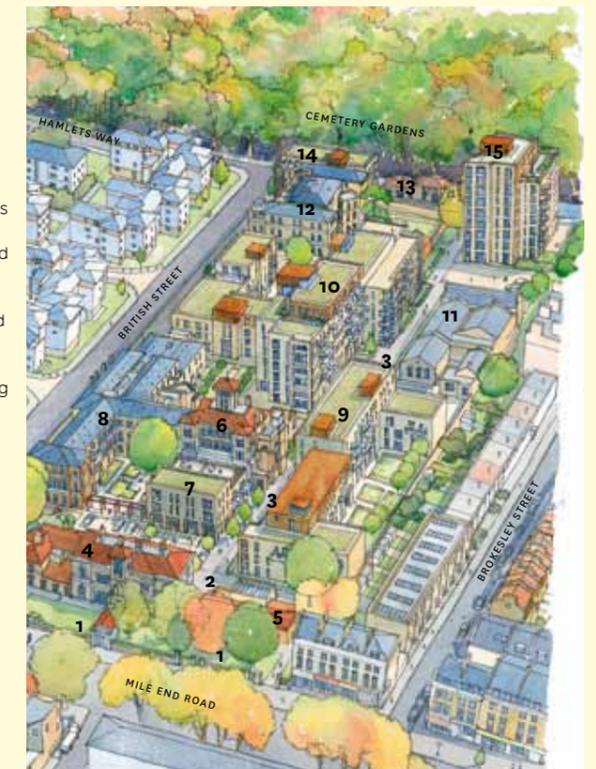
- 1 New public realm with existing gates opened to provide access
- 2 New South-facing square with terrace and water features
- 3 The Pavement

Mixed Uses

- 4 John Denham Building becomes business hub and café
- 5 Bungalow Building retained and converted for commercial use

Residential Uses

- 6 Administration Building retained and converted to residential use
- 7 Block A: new residential building on footprint of former Chapel
- 8 North Block retained and converted to residential use
- 9 New residential building with family duplex dwellings
- 10 Courtyard Gardens: residential building encloses private garden
- 11 South Block: residential
- 12 Occupational therapy building and Laundry: residential
- 13 Generator/mortuary to be converted for residential use
- 14 Block H: residential building on South East boundary
- 15 New taller residential building creates landmark to South.



OCEAN ESTATE REGENERATION, TOWER HAMLETS

Levitt Bernstein Associates create a public realm-led development framework



URBAN DESIGN OBJECTIVES AND ANALYSIS

Levitt Bernstein's Urban Design team led the design team that developed the framework for the East Thames Consortium to regenerate the Ocean Estate in Tower Hamlets, London. The £200m transformation programme involved the refurbishment of 1,200 existing council homes, 1044 new homes built for affordable rent, shared ownership and market sale, estate-wide environmental improvements and the enhancement of the local neighbourhood centre. The wider spatial framework looks at improving the streets and the public spaces through improved lighting, tree planting and street furniture. The identified infill sites were developed to fit in closely with their immediate context through clear linkages and sensitive treatment to buildings in terms of their scale and massing.

The high public transport accessibility level (PTAL) of the area was always a key driver in the development of the density but was secondary in terms of the place-making principles. Building heights range from 2 to 13 storeys, with an average density of 236 dph (450 hr/ha).

The Urban Design Framework set out to create:

- A neighbourhood that is unique yet integrated with Mile End Park, Mile End Road and Stepney Green tube station
- A clear urban structure that can be developed and redeveloped over time while benefitting from the established physical infrastructure of the surrounding street network, as well as providing a sympathetic response to the Stepney Green conservation area and the Grade 1 listed St Dunstan's Church
- An adequate provision of social infrastructure that encourages residents to settle in and grow their families in the neighbourhood
- A safe environment where streets and open spaces benefit from natural surveillance, and pedestrians and cyclists take priority. This is in line with the Council's stated aim to reduce traffic on borough roads and to encourage the use of sustainable means of travel.

The site was reviewed carefully with regards to the relationship with the adjacent open spaces, conservation areas, transport, commercial areas, educational areas, leisure and amenity. This analysis

was undertaken for an area up to 1.5km from the site.

The estate is located between two major train routes into Liverpool Street and Fenchurch Street. There are high levels of connectivity from the site: bus routes, underground lines, railway and DLR stations are within relatively short walking distance, and public open spaces, with ecological value (Mile End Park and the Grand Union Canal) are easily accessible. The spatial framework looks at strengthening these connections, providing easy east-west and north-south access to make the area more accessible. The strategic links into the wider East London Green Grid Network to the east of the site led to the formulation of a strong landscape infrastructure proposal that sought to increase the access to adjacent green amenity space as well as the creation of 'eco-ducts'.

DELIVERY PROCESS

The outline and detail planning applications were made within a 12-week period. Within the planning authority there was a complex pattern reflecting the different concerns of key departments and their officers. The local authority was both

← The wider spatial strategy/ masterplan (inset) looks at environmental improvements to key public spaces and routes through the area, with strategic infill sites identified for redevelopment
 ↓ The overarching spatial plan looks at improving linkages to the wider area, with key gateways and hubs at important junctions

responsible for tendering the project and securing the best possible standards whilst planners and technical officers had clear policy guidelines to meet. To achieve clear decisions for the authority, key officers came together to weekly coordinated meetings with the design team and the client team, to develop both the detail of the brief and the design solutions.

CONTRIBUTION TO URBAN DESIGN PRACTICE

The height and massing of the perimeter blocks have been carefully articulated in accordance to context. The relationship with adjacent non-community uses, as well as adjacent schools, the microclimatic conditions, as well as long and short range views of the buildings, have all played a part in the development of the built form. Reviewing sunlight and daylight issues in communal courtyard spaces has led to breaks in the southwest-southeast corners of the perimeter block form. Respecting adjacent users and looking far beyond the red line boundary was

important, so that the scheme did not impact negatively upon the adjacent uses, such as the Regents Canal Conservation Area. Reviewing the needs of neighbours like the primary school led to careful analysis of ground floor uses to help generate an active streetscape environment and dealing with waste and refuse was a major design consideration in the layout.

LESSONS LEARNED

- 1 Understanding the context:** A thorough analysis of the surrounding physical, social and economic context by the design team was key to understanding the design parameters.
- 2 Emerging framework:** The strong over-arching vision document addressed all of the key masterplan issues at a strategic level, leading to the delivery of a high quality development.
- 3 Placemaking principles:** The spatial strategy focused on the creation of place and looked at a long term vision for the wider area. This involved a

thorough analysis of the local and wider context, understanding the history of the site and the social, physical and economic characteristics of the area.

- 4 Working with the community:** The ambition to make the Ocean Estate an exemplar model of high density development emerged through a collaborative design process involving many stakeholders. Resident involvement was an important part of the regeneration and we ensured comprehensive engagement with existing residents throughout the design process. We ran a monthly resident forum, held annual fun days and ran local consultation events.
- 5 Character areas:** The various character areas have transformed the Ocean Estate into an attractive, green and fully-integrated part of East London. The perimeter block strategy has formed new and safer streets that link into the wider street network and promote pedestrian and cycle permeability. ●



TRENT BASIN

URBED develop a new neighbourhood for Nottingham, not quite urban, not quite suburban

A good masterplan needs a really good brief. The following is an extract from URBED's brief from Blueprint for the Trent Basin site. We were told to develop a plan that created...

'A new type of neighbourhood. Not quite urban. Not quite suburban. Close to the city, but not in it. A place where the countryside sprawls in to the city, not vice versa. Growing and productive. Trees and bees. Blue water. Fresh air. Salubrious. Calm. An oasis. Not dominated by cars. Not an anonymous, cloned estate. Not about bars, European bottled lager and pizza. Nor pushing the pram to Costa. More about cycling, dog walking,

jogging, fishing, boating, reading, chatting. Living, resting, exercising. Working? for some. At home, and on the water. A place to stroll. To walk along the river. To soak up tranquillity. Intimate. Public spaces, small but intense, not large and barren. A place to be healthy. A place to be happy.'

It is rare to get such a poetic brief but also incredibly liberating. It leaves no doubt about the sort of place that Blueprint wants – on a site that only a few years ago was to have been developed with large apartment blocks. It is a vision that has been supported by Nottingham City Council to such an extent that URBED



were subsequently appointed to develop a masterplan for the whole waterside area. This article covers both of these plans.

Located on the northern bank of the River Trent, 20 minutes' walk from Nottingham city centre, the Trent Basin site is being developed by Blueprint in a joint venture between igloo and the HCA. Formerly a light industrial area, the 3.5ha site has recently been cleared and prepared for development by the HCA.

URBED together with Marsh Grochowski Architects and Landscape Projects have prepared a hybrid planning application seeking outline consent for 160 homes and detailed consent for a first phase of 41 homes. Planning consent was granted earlier this year and a contractor has been appointed for Phase 1 with works expected to commence later in 2014.

As the brief made quite clear, the aim is to create a new type of neighbourhood that is neither entirely urban nor entirely suburban. To do this we have drawn heavily on Dutch precedents for the way that the scheme relates to the water. The design creates a strong 3 and 4 storey waterside terrace punctuated by narrow streets leading to more informal detached housing to the rear. The waterfront terrace undulates along the water's edge, creating a variety of public spaces within which stand three freestanding point blocks.

In many senses the scheme is a reinvention of the suburb rather than a lively urban neighbourhood. The idea is that the blocks, set back from the waterfront, feel calm and relaxed and not dominated by cars. In collaboration with Nottingham-based architects, Marsh Grochowski who have developed the house types for phase 1, and with landscape architects Landscape Projects based in Manchester, we have set out to create a neighbourhood based around cycling, dog walking, jogging, fishing, reading, chatting, exercising and working. For this to be successful, the quality of the public and communal realm is key. In the early phases the urban blocks are designed around central communal gardens where small children will be free to play, and communal barbecues and food growing can take place.

The scheme also makes use of the basin which has 3m high dock walls. The plan includes a floating platform at water level. This rises and falls with the river level thereby satisfying the Environment

↙ Aerial View of Trent Basin
↘ View of floating garden

↓ Plan of Trent Basin
↘ Wider strategy for Waterfront Area commissioned by Nottingham City Council

Agency which wanted to retain the basin for flood capacity. The floating deck gives access to the water and allows for floating gardens and moorings.

The scheme builds on Blueprint's experience of developing the nearby Green Street low-energy housing scheme (short listed for the inaugural UDG Developer Award 2014). Green Street successfully appealed to groups not normally attracted to new housing. Rather than families with children, the buyers were couples downsizing from larger properties when their children leave home, young adults cohabiting and parents living with grown-up offspring. The Trent Basin scheme is designed to appeal to groups who are seeking somewhere that does not feel like a housing estate, but which is a sustainable neighbourhood with a strong sense of community and shared values. This has implications for the public realm suggesting informal, intimate gathering points and places to stroll, rather than playgrounds and public squares.

LESSONS LEARNED

The wider plan for Nottingham Waterside developed in the mid 2000s had a very different vision for the area. The masterplan was dominated by large apartment blocks and the fact that it was not developed is probably a lucky escape.

The Trent Basin scheme represents a fragment of this wider area and the URBED plan is designed so that it can be integrated into the neighbouring sites when they come forward for development, but still makes sense if they do not. This is a common problem with waterside areas, where fragmented land ownerships make comprehensive planning difficult, so that there is a danger that sites are developed in a piecemeal, disconnected fashion.

URBED's new wider plan prepared for the Council provides an alternative to the apartment block based masterplan, following the spirit of the Trent Basin brief. The intention is that this can be used to coordinate development in the area. It includes a framework for up to 1650 new homes, a school and community facilities. It creates a framework for the creation of an entirely new neighbourhood in Nottingham that provides an alternative to both the high density urban development of the city centre and the low density suburbia around the periphery of the city. ●

