

The Housing Times

Harrogate Edition 2010

Editorial

Undoubtedly, Social Housing is facing unprecedented challenges, not least financial. But our sector has embraced and been driven by positive change for over a decade and that means we are well placed to rise to those challenges...

Of course, the primary function of Social Housing remains the provision of high quality, affordable and sustainable homes for the millions of people who depend upon them. But how that can be achieved is a million miles away from the old days of matching a grant to a project and getting on with it. Today all of us involved in that provision have a range of options that even those of us who championed Egan and the start of Partnering all those years ago, never envisaged. Today contractors, housing associations and local authorities can all take risk – and share it. The relatively straightforward principles behind a 106 have evolved to encompass not just cross-subsidies but a reversal of approach whereby private housing is developed as a result of a social housing initiative. Consequently, mixed private/social developments, once thought to be commercial suicide, have proved to be anything but. Major projects that would have been delivered through a series of self-contained phases (ten or more was not uncommon) are now tackled as a whole with ambition and imagination. Today, Social Housing wins awards that were, not so long ago, seemingly reserved for the private sector. Indeed, our sector continues to show some volume house builders how it should be done and to lead the way in achieving ever improving standards of energy efficiency and sustainability.

This edition of The Housing Times is therefore focused on a series of projects, both recently completed and still on site, that demonstrate how the imaginative application of financial flexibility, shared risk, private/social integration, innovative construction and architectural integrity is meeting those challenges head on.



Of all the things which the sixties left as a legacy, perhaps the least favourite is the tower block. They remain infamous as one of this country's least successful architectural and planning projects. But while demolition was once considered the only cure, an increasing number of tower blocks are being retained, restored and regenerated. When problems including insulation, security and access are properly sorted, tower blocks become good places to live – and that work has become something of a United House speciality...

The £6.7m renewal of Four Courts Estate, Hastings (above), is one such project. Built in 1967, the estate comprises four 17-storey tower blocks. Each block has 100 one and two bedroom flats along with the usual list of problems common to buildings of this type and vintage... and one not so common. The existing pitch fibre soil stacks are failing requiring the renewal of the entire above ground soil and waste system – while residents remain in occupation. So urgent is this complex problem, that our Engineers and Design

Team built a full-scale, three-storey, off-site scaffold mock-up to fine-tune the solution.

The Housing Association responsible, Amicus Horizon, has set the highest standards for the major overhaul of the blocks and the flats they contain. Externally, there will be new roofs and the external walls will be fitted with insulated cladding; the electrical supply to the blocks is being upgraded while the grounds will be landscaped. A new IRS (Independent Receiving System) will be installed and the neighbourhood office converted. Internally, lobby areas will be transformed and every flat will have new ventilation and new door entry systems.

To add to the challenge, the CO₂ footprint of the finished blocks must be reduced. Also, great importance has been given not just to what we do, but how we do it... We are working closely with the Residents' Association to ensure the residents of Four Courts (and the immediate community) are involved

and informed – as with any residents-in-occupation project, their support is vital, especially during periods of intense activity on site and we are keen to show our appreciation.

We have a target of 50% local labour and supply with work placements and training being offered through our established relationship with the local Education Business Partnership. We will also be providing support to local schools including job interview and health & safety training and *Opportunities in Construction* presentations.

The project started in March this year and is scheduled to be completed in August 2011.



Recent United House high-rise projects: Camden PFI (left) and Royal Free, Newlon HA.

CSR LATEST

It's not just about construction...

Every year, *Places for People* holds a Customer Involvement Week in which hundreds of events are organised up and down the country for residents.

In Peacehaven (right), people said they would like their drying area spruced up and some plants put in to brighten up the path leading down to the scheme's communal green space. United House provided the staff and donated tools and materials including benches and plants. Everyone joined in. Advice was provided on energy efficiency by United House and on fire safety by the Newhaven Fire Brigade. Participants thoroughly enjoyed the day, making new friends, and everyone commented what a difference the improvements made.

Our commitment to *Places for People* continued in Faversham where we joined staff from the organisation and local residents to make up hanging baskets for the surrounding area.



NEW WEBSITE TO SPREAD THE NEWS

If you log onto United House's website this week (www.unitedhouse.net) you will see a brand new and improved site to coincide with the start of Harrogate. Since our previous site was launched over four years ago, both the housing sector and United House have seen radical changes which are reflected in the new site. The new site is user friendly; has much improved navigation and features our latest project and regeneration case studies, news on our low carbon retrofit work and what we believe is the only contractor blog, including Eric Pickles' views on local delivery...



Developing a taste for mixed tenure

With mixed tenure, cross-subsidies and ever-closer relationships between private and social housing, development has become an integral element to the provision of social housing. Here are just a few of United House's recent development projects:



Arundel Square



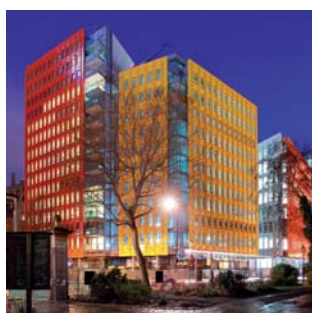
Frobisher Crescent



Queensbridge Quarter



Wenlock Building



Central St Giles

First new coalition housing announced

Following the formation of the new government, LB Davnick has announced plans for the first development of what it calls 'Coalition Housing'. In a borough wide vote, local residents were asked to choose between three basic options covering key criteria including basic format (house, flat, maisonette...); number of bedrooms; kitchen facilities; energy efficiency etc.

With none of the three options having overwhelming support, the Council has announced a necessary compromise – the 387 new-build units will be built back-to-back and feature 4.5 bedrooms, two kitchens and no bathroom. The 23% of voters who stated that private gardens were a priority will, no doubt, be disappointed but the Council is confident that the provision of secure parking for an extra 500 cars will be a welcome, and placatory, alternative.

Cllr. John Cleggsley, a local resident, leader of the Council's radical campaigning group, 'Bungalows for All' and now number two on its newly formed 'Combined Committee for the Provision of People's Shelter'

(COCOPOPS), said of the result, "The proposed three-storey town houses are exactly what is wanted. They are in the Borough's best interest"

In a further move to meet both the anticipated budget cuts and the residents' overwhelming support for energy efficiency, the plans have been swiftly redrawn to accommodate five artesian wells from which residents will draw water. Roofs have also been removed to maximize the provision of natural light, improve access to direct solar power and enhance rainwater capture. The initial commitment to install the first ever nuclear powered CHP unit has been referred to a new Commission for further consideration.

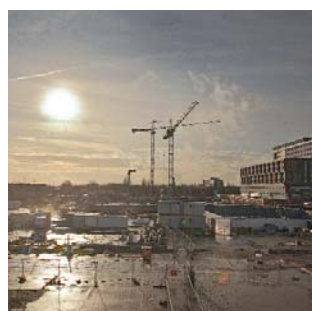
The scheme has a fixed works schedule of five years and caterers have already been booked for the handover ceremony on Thursday, May 7th 2015. However, as those Councilors who did not make it onto COCOPOPS are already voicing their dismay at the Committee's decision that sandwiches on the day will have their crusts off, it could be a difficult time.

ALL HAIL TOTTENHAM'S 388 NEW HOMES

Hale Village in Tottenham is a truly ambitious project. Indeed, it is seen by Newlon Housing Trust as a flagship regeneration scheme. Not only are 388 one to five bedroom houses, flats and maisonettes being created, but the scheme is spread across five self-contained projects and two phases of major, site-wide infrastructure works including roads, drains, services, power supply etc. Up to four buildings are being worked on simultaneously. Challenges include having to work within 40m

of a railway line and surveying Second World War industrial estate bomb shelters for explosives prior to their removal.

The £32m Hale Village complex will be supplied with central heating from a CHP unit currently under construction and which will be powered by two biomass boilers and two gas boilers as a back up system. The biomass boilers burn recycled wood (mainly old packing crates and pallets) with hot water stored in two large cylinders before distribution. Each flat will also have an



individual HIU that will produce separate hot water. An electrical sub-station is also being constructed by United House for Newlon Housing Trust. Hale Village involves not only major construction and engineering, it also features novel innovations – one of the buildings, for example, will have roof-top allotments!



Financial innovation still leads the way

While we deal with the consequences of over-speculation and financial mismanagement, there is a danger that sensible risk sharing; sound, innovative financial models and a well-planned approach to specific markets are tarred with the same brush.

However, working with partners to establish the most effective way of delivering the housing required remains critical.

Take the £20m regeneration of Beavers Lane Estate (below) in Hounslow for example. Hounslow Homes was in a familiar

three bedroom properties to comply with local planning policy. Social housing residents will be transferred to the care of Hounslow Homes and, by completion, 190 new homes will have been built in a much improved, well-lit landscape. The plan ensures maximum use is made of the available space while the existing open spaces at the front of each block will be retained.

Seen in terms of construction, this is perhaps not so unusual, though the close collaboration with Stanford Eatwell Architects has ensured that residents will only have to move once and the whole project will be completed in less than three years. That the new estate will be truly mixed tenure may also be noteworthy. But it is the manner in which the scheme is funded that really stands out as it involves contributions from the HCA, the Local Authority, a Housing Association, an ALMO – and 100% cross-subsidy for the replacement rented homes.

This cross-subsidy was a prescribed element of the government's pilot scheme to allow ALMOs to own new assets and, with this scheme, Hounslow Homes will be one of the first. Meanwhile, A2 Dominion Housing Group is developing and will sell the shared ownership properties while United House will develop and sell the private housing.

The £80m Clapham One Regeneration Scheme (pictured top) presents a different approach to funding an ambitious project. Initially, this Public Private Partnership scheme for LB Lambeth will provide a new state-of-the-art community library (a unique and complex spiral design by Studio Egret West), a new 20,000 sq ft primary care medical centre and 136 high-quality apartments for private sale which United House and the Cathedral Group are developing jointly. The completed project will also include a new leisure centre and 63 homes (including 44 for social use) to be built on the nearby Clapham Manor Street site as part of a separate contract.



situation – the estate was run-down and its four walk-up blocks built in the 1950s were suffering from structural defects within the concrete floors, the flats all suffered from poor energy efficiency and the immediate environment was poor, though it contained sufficient vacant land for imaginative redevelopment. Hounslow Homes' first move was to instigate an options appraisal and consult with central Government. Following this, the ALMO advertised for development partners to enter into a framework agreement to deliver the project. United House was chosen.

72 flats with structural defects have to be demolished and replaced. In the first phase, lasting two years, 32 new homes for social rent, 23 shared ownership homes and 38 homes for private sale will be built. The new homes will comprise one, two and three bedroom flats and two and three bedroom houses with a relatively high proportion of

London borough rediscovers newbuild

Spread over four sites and comprising 17 new three and four bedroom houses for affordable rent by local people, LB Barking and Dagenham's first New Build project in 25 years will regenerate unused land, hitherto a magnet for anti social behaviour.

To help achieve Level 4 of the Code for Sustainable Homes, the homes will be constructed with highly thermal and energy efficient timber insulated panels known as SIPs (Structural Insulated Panels) and feature photovoltaic cells on the roofs, generating 20% of the energy requirement through a renewable source. The £2.35m project was secured by grant funding from the Homes and Communities Agency.