Case study: Green Man Lane Estate

This case study explains how a structured, clear resident engagement process created a high level of trust between residents and their landlord and successfully addressed the specific needs of tenants and leaseholders.

Project name: Green Man Lane Estate
Location: Ealing, London
Housing Association: A2Dominion Housing Association
Local Authority: Ealing Council
Design team: Conran and Partners Architects

The opportunity

The Green Man Lane estate sits behind the main high street in Ealing, west London. The estate was composed of a series of modest tower blocks and concrete slab blocks. It had suffered a number of long-term maintenance issues, such as:

– Deterioration in its large concrete panels, leading to a weakened structure
– Inadequate insulation leading to high heating costs and problems with damp and mould
– Previous repairs and alterations coming to the end of their service life and needing replacement.

There were also a number of design problems with how the existing estate was laid out which tenants felt were impacting on their quality of life. It was not easy to find your way around – walkways and entrances to blocks felt unattractive and unsafe. Much of the estate was openly accessible and allowed people who did not live on the estate to walk through or loiter, which resulted in antisocial behaviour and made residents feel vulnerable.

There was very little exclusive open space for residents and what existed was of poor quality and not well-defined as either private or public space. The mix of housing types and sizes on the estate did not match the demand. Originally built to provide accommodation for older people in studio and one-bedroom properties, the need was increasingly for family-sized houses and flats.

Ealing Council investigated the Green Man Lane estate as part of a borough-wide review, where it was identified as one of eight ‘High Intervention Estates’, which would require significant change. The Council concluded refurbishment was uneconomic and the estate needed to be replaced.
What they did

Ealing Council set up a public meeting to present the results of the review and set up a Residents Steering Group. It pledged to be open and honest with residents and a number of formal commitments were made:

- To replace the social housing on a floorspace basis (meeting the local demand for larger flats and houses meant that there would be fewer social homes overall)
- To offer leaseholders equity shares of a new dwelling equivalent to the value of their current property but without a requirement to pay rent on the share that they do not own.
- Tenants would move from Council tenancies to a housing association secure tenancy. If a tenant wished to remain a Council tenant they were offered properties on Council-owned estates elsewhere in the borough.
What happened next

Resident engagement began with a series of workshops and visits to other regeneration schemes to explore what regeneration meant, the moving process and how changing landlord would work. Ealing Council trained residents in viability to help them understand the finances of the development and its role in shaping the development – for example the number of dwellings required on the site and the mix of dwellings between social tenancies, equity share and market sale. The Council convened separate meetings for social tenants and leaseholders, allowing each group to explore their views with people in the same situation.

This process concluded with a public exhibition for residents and a mailing to gauge the appetite for regeneration. On the basis of positive support from residents the Council’s Cabinet decided to proceed with redevelopment and seek out a developer partner through a competitive bidding process.

The Council then set up a Developer Selection Group made up of residents, who produced questions which were put to bidders and marked each bid. This was relayed to Cabinet, which appointed the successful developer – A2Dominion Housing Association.

Challenges

– Long timescales: Working intensively with tenants from an early stage before going out to tender took time – one year.
– Customising requirements: Balancing the needs of tenants and leaseholders, which were not always the same.

Site visit to Green Man Lane Estate during training event, November 2015, London © Design Council Cabe
Community-led Design and Development: Case study – Green Man Lane Estate

Solutions and lessons learned

– All parties benefited from clarity around how and why decisions would be made and by whom.
– Residents felt empowered but also had a realistic view of their influence and how their opinions would inform decisions.
– Council officers felt that the process made their roles easier to carry out and led to a higher degree of trust from tenants in the Council as a responsible landlord.
– The majority of residents got an individual outcome that suited them, which has helped reduce tension between different resident groups who, without such careful planning and communication of outcomes, might have led to some groups feeling marginalised.
– A2Dominion and their design team at Conran and Partners could immediately start working with a well informed and empowered set of residents. The Developer Selection Group became an ongoing Residents Project Panel which continued to inform the project design.