



Awards for Planning Excellence Case Study

North Prospect Phase 3

Entered by Plymouth City Council and Plymouth
Community Homes

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1. Project Background

North Prospect is a neighbourhood in Plymouth with housing built between the 1920's and 1950's. These homes marked Plymouth City Council's (PCC) first new build housing following the Housing Act of 1919 to allow the building of "Homes for Heroes" after the First World War.

This was the start of state-owned housing with the government at the time experimenting with mass produced housing methods including steel framed 'Dorlonco' houses and precast concrete frame Stonecrete houses in the area.

Described by the local newspaper as 'paradise for 12 shillings a week', the estate formerly known as Swilly represented an improvement on the overcrowded and inadequate living conditions that existed otherwise. The area was built to garden city principles resulting in a low housing density but a lack of communal green spaces and play facilities.

Until the 1950s, the area was popular and described as prosperous. However, it suffered a downturn which led to a re-branding of the area to North Prospect in 1969.

Despite efforts, the area continued to decline throughout the 1980s and 1990s, leading to realisation that major intervention would be required to address the social problems and physical deterioration of the housing stock.

North Prospect was an area of high-crime and low employment rates with 76% of properties available for social rent. The area suffered from a poor reputation with very low house values and little private investment taking place.

In 2007, Mae Architects and StUF (Strategic Urban Futures) produced a Housing Development Framework on behalf of PCC which considered a financing strategy to address the structural problems of the housing stock and looked at urban design and sustainability issues.

In 2009, the Homes and Communities Agency and PCC conducted an objective setting workshop which was followed by a scoping study report by consultants Levitt Bernstein and a business plan by Savills.

In 2009, PCC transferred its social housing stock to the newly formed Plymouth Community Homes (PCH), who took over the lead on the regeneration including the restoration of 277 homes and re-development.

The five-phase redevelopment involved the demolition of almost 800 poorly constructed, energy inefficient, damp 3-bed properties which provided an unhealthy and unsustainable living environment.

These are being replaced with over 1100 high quality, energy efficient new homes offering a greater variety of house types, sizes and tenures to create a sustainably mixed neighbourhood.

Around 40% of these homes are for open market sale whilst the remaining are affordable housing tenures.

Phases 1 and 2 were completed in 2014 and 2017 respectively whilst Phase 3 completed in February 2020.

Phases 4 and 5 are currently underway with expected completion dates in 2025 and 2022.

Phase 3 involved demolition of 141 homes to make way for 159 energy efficient properties offering choice for all demographics. Funding for the third phase included a £4.3M affordable housing grant from Homes England towards the £22.6M cost for the affordable homes.

2. Outcomes for People and Communities

Phase 3 has provided a range of positive outcomes for people and communities.

Prior to the redevelopment, PCC's sustainable neighbourhood development plan highlighted a high level of unemployment in the area, particularly in long term unemployment, and few local job opportunities.

Therefore, one of the requirements of the regeneration was to offer employment and training opportunities to local people to support the local economy.

As part of the planning permission, the developer for Phase 3, Kier Living (now Tilia Homes) established the North Prospect Training Academy which provided participants with a six-week construction skills programme including a mix of theory and learning.

After completing studies towards a CSCS card to allow them to work on a building site, learners gained experience working on the development whilst attending lectures at City College Plymouth.

The academy was prioritised for those living in PL2 (North Prospect) postcodes and up to 20 people from the area were taken on as apprentices during the academy intakes with an opportunity to apply for jobs at the end.

Phase 3 also made improvements for young people in the area through contributions to education:

Prior to the redevelopment, PCC's sustainable neighbourhood development plan highlighted low levels of educational attainment. It was agreed that Phase 3 of the regeneration needed to include the provision of a new two class intake primary school and Nursery, 'Mayflower Community Academy'.

The school was rated 'Outstanding' by Ofsted during development and Level 4 scores for pupils were up and better than the national average at the time.

The development has also made improvements for residents with physical disabilities. The new streets in Phase 3 have been made accessible for residents with mobility scooters through wide pavements and dropped kerbs whilst 26 PCH homes were built to 'Lifetime Homes' M4(2) standards, providing long-term adaptability to residents' changing needs.

The regeneration has also provided the community with access to more open space, aiming to have a positive impact on health and wellbeing:

Previously the area lacked open space for informal and formal recreation, however Phase 3 increased the size and facilities at existing green space in Cookworthy Green. These improvements were identified based on the consultation of the local community where it was found that the public open space provides a valuable local facility but was underused due to lack of play equipment.

Most significantly, the regeneration has had a positive impact on safety in the public realm with PCC's sustainable neighbourhood development plan highlighting high levels of deprivation, anti-social behaviour and local crime.

To combat this, the scheme was designed to the Secured by Design (SBD) standard and achieved the gold award. SBD were involved in design and planning stages and advised on the layout and landscaping of the scheme as well as the physical security of buildings.

PCH and Devon & Cornwall Police have reported a significant fall in crime and anti-social behaviour compared to pre-development. Police statistics show a consistent fall in crime in burglary, vehicle crime and criminal damage.

3. Planning Contribution

Planning practitioners in varying roles were essential in defining the overall regeneration project and in the delivery of it. A Planning Officer and a Housing Enabling Officer from within the Planning

Department at PCC were actively involved throughout the various phases of the regeneration and lessons learnt from earlier phases have been used to improve the process.

The planning authority identified a Senior Planning Officer as the Case Officer for the project. The planning authority allocated this Planning Officer as 'one point of contact' even before the first formal pre-application meeting. The Planning Officer, through early engagement, worked with PCH to resolve issues in the process.

The Case Officer was responsible for coordinating a team of consultees from different departments within and external to PCC. This specialist advice fed into the Planning Officers assessment and was used to secure amendments to the scheme and ensure a comprehensive, sustainable regeneration project would be delivered in the long term.

Planning Officers were able to advise PCH on the community consultation that took place, working with local Councillors and the key milestones that they needed to achieve to receive a planning decision within required timeframes.

Planning Officers continued to work closely with PCH following the grant of planning permission in dealing with any necessary amendments to the scheme and to get conditions discharged promptly.

PCH also commissioned a masterplanning consultant (Levitt Bernstein) who developed The North Prospect Spatial Strategy and Design Code documents. These were useful documents to provide the context and help to develop the overall vision for the area.

From these documents and drawing on previous work undertaken as part of the 'Sustainable Neighbourhood programme', an Area Planning Statement was developed, led by a Senior Planning Officer which included comments from the community.

This Area Planning Statement was the result of a joint exercise between all parties and set out planning and design principles together with the wider regeneration goals. The document reflected the planning policies in the Core Strategy as well as the national policy as per National Planning Policy Framework 2012. It outlined the best use of land and sustainable development, reduction of inequalities through the provision of new and improved housing and through increasing local job and training opportunities and advised how to build on and develop community engagement.

Whilst the Area Planning Statement was not formally adopted it formed a material consideration in the planning process and all of those involved were able to use this to guide development and inform the planning application process.

PCH used PCC's development enquiry service to engage in extensive pre-application discussions prior to the submission of the planning application for Phase 3, with regular meetings and correspondence over the course of a year.

This allowed a proactive, cooperative scheme development, which took into account comments received through public consultation events that took place prior to the planning application submission.

The excellent communication and dialogue between PCH and the planning department at PCC ensured the planning application was dealt with efficiently.

4. Outcomes for climate action

The new homes at Phase 3 were built with environmental sustainability and the goal to help combat fuel poverty in mind.

The post-war housing that was demolished as part of the regeneration project had very low energy efficiency ratings and the construction materials used were often of low quality or contained a health hazard, such as asbestos. Whilst retention of existing building substance should always be a first consideration with regard to carbon efficiency and embodied carbon, this was not a viable option for the homes at North Prospect.

All affordable units were built to Code for Sustainable Homes Level 4 standards, which was relevant at the time of the planning process, to ensure residents had access to high quality, energy efficient homes.

The Code required an assessment of the performance of new homes during design and once construction was complete. It measured sustainability against specific categories such as energy and carbon monoxide emissions, pollution, waste, ecology and materials with performance targets set for each area which the affordable units at Phase 3 achieved.

As well as adhering to the Code for Sustainable Homes Level 4 standards, other measures were included in the planning and build of the development.

The houses at Phase 3 were orientated to take advantage of the sun's energy, optimising the opportunity to use natural lighting and Photovoltaic (PV) panels to reduce heating and lighting costs amongst residents and plans suggested 135kWp of photovoltaic (PV) panels to the development to achieve a 15% reduction in the scheme's total carbon dioxide emissions.

To encourage use of public transport and other means of travel that alleviate vehicle emissions, the roads in the development were designed to accommodate cyclists and pedestrians. Pedestrian links throughout the neighbourhood were also introduced to increase walkability and the number of trips currently done by walking and cycling.

The development also had a well-thought hierarchy of streets that provided residents with easy access to the main transport route through North Prospect with the nearby bus stop located on the main route. These considerations all work towards reducing car usage and therefore aim to reduce vehicle emissions.

Furthermore, where possible, materials resulting from the demolition of existing buildings were recycled. This reduced the amount of primary aggregates used and reduced the transport and carbon costs involved in transporting them to the site.

5. Outcomes for sustainable development

Phase 3 meets Goal 11 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals; Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable with 10 individual targets recognised underneath this.

Target 11.1 sets out that 'by 2030, ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing...'. Phase 3 meets this target by offering a wide selection of tenures and property types and sizes to accommodate different demographics.

Around 40% homes at Phase 3 were for open market sale whilst the remaining offered a variety of affordable options including rent and shared ownership ensuring a socially mixed, sustainable neighbourhood where all had access to adequate and safe housing that's affordable to them. To further

support affordability, the homes were designed to be energy efficient, helping to keep energy costs low for residents. This is particularly relevant now given the current steep rises in utility bills

As well as a wide mix of housing in the development, Phase 3 has also been designed to ensure accessibility amongst its residents including those with mobility problems including mobility scooters or mothers with push chairs. New and existing streets around the neighbourhood have achieved a lifetime environment through their wide pavements and dropped kerbs and lifetime homes were also built so that the needs of the whole community are met whatever their age. Streets have also been designed to allow for pedestrians to have priority to encourage people to engage with each other and for children to take part in doorstep play.

Target 11.2 sets out that 'by 2030, provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transport, with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons.'

Phase 3 has ensured that residents have access to transport systems through strategic design of the development. The new neighbourhood enhances the existing hierarchy of streets found in the area and improves pedestrian links to the key bus services found along Wolseley Road and North Prospect Road.

Sufficient convenient and secure parking spaces for residents and visitors has been provided to avoid un-neighbourly, unsightly or dangerous parking and the streets have been designed with changes in surface materials to indicate pedestrian priority, or traffic calming to limit traffic speeds or vehicular access.

Target 11.7 sets out that 'by 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities'. Prior to the completion of Phase 3, Cookworthy Green, an existing accessible green space, was increased in size and quality with more play facility areas following consultation with the local community who stated that the public open space provided a valuable local facility.

6. Community Engagement

Throughout Phase 3 and the wider redevelopment at North Prospect, PCH and PCC have worked with the local community and maintained a dialogue to ensure any concerns and feedback were heard.

Due to the demolition of existing homes and re-provision of these in the local area, PCH engaged with the local community in two consultation exercises in September 2014 at the early stage of the pre-application discussions with Plymouth City Council planning officers and in June 2015.

The first event spread over two days with approximately 50 people attending and raising comments and concerns. A design review then took place which considered these together with feedback from Planning Officers, resulting in the next set of plans to be displayed at the second consultation event.

The second consultation event was held at The Beacon Community Hub, chosen for its physical access and proximity to those most affected by the proposal, and included feedback from the first consultation plus draft layout and 3D contextual plans.

63 people attended following a leaflet drop to 1,500 properties and posters displayed in the area. Two local councillors and MP Johnny Mercer's Parliamentary Assistant attended the event.

Attendees discussed the scheme and were invited to leave their comments in a comments box, have their views recorded or email or telephone the planning consultant after the event. Their comments were considered by the design team and fed back into the evolving design as well as summarised in the public consultation statement.

The team attending the event included representatives from Situ8 Planning Consultancy, Kier Living, PCH and PCC's Housing Enabling Officer. The consultation events were also made effective by PCH using a third-party advocate, Zebra Collective, as a tool to engage with residents. The Zebra Collective are a local organisation who have experience working with communities and supporting them through change and regeneration.

This provided a channel where residents could discuss their concerns independently to PCH with a focus on supporting residents to articulate themselves during the consultation. This allowed true feelings to be heard, given the sensitive nature of this regeneration.

Wider surveys to residents were also completed on specific aspects of the development including a PCC led survey in 2011 about the existing green spaces.

As well as surveys and consultation events, PCH had a dedicated Rehousing team with three Officers responsible for supporting all residents whose homes were demolished. Through these Rehousing Officers, residents had direct line of communication with PCH to provide feedback on the proposals of Phase 3.

The developer, Kier Living, also provided a Community Engagement Officer who was based on site. The Officer attended local schools to speak about the development, site safety and the training academy.

Following the completion of Phase 3, PCH asked for feedback from 120 residents across the latest phases seeking their views in general on their new home and neighbourhood. Residents were also asked whether they felt safe in their new home. Overall, 93.1% of residents were satisfied with their new home.

7. Leading Practice

Phase 3 is part of a larger, complex regeneration project that has spanned over 10 years since the first phase of redevelopment. This made it particularly challenging for each phase to ensure that the overall ambitions of the development were met. The demolition and relocation of existing homes and livelihoods added to its complexity.

This regeneration project has shown many unique and creative ways of working through the detailed master planning that was undertaken at the outset, production of planning guidance specific to the scheme and the unique approach to community consultation with the use of a third-party advocate as a tool to engage with residents.

This approach to community consultation offered many benefits to not only to the residents affected in ensuring their valued opinions were heard but also in ensuring these comments were incorporated into the emerging proposals to create the best scheme possible. Despite the social issues in the area, North Prospect had a strong sense of community which was identified as a foundation for future progress (Flying Giraffe report, 2004). It was essential that Phase 3 enhanced the lives of people living in the area and concentrated on enhancing this sense of community. Surveys were undertaken with residents

to feedback and the Community Engagement Officer was an essential, direct link between the local community and the developer and was able to resolve many issues arising quickly and fairly. Pre-application discussions with residents took place between October 2014 and October 2015 to consider their views in detail.

Collaborative working between the applicant and the Planning Officers allowed for a flexible approach to be taken in relation to planning contributions. The development was extremely challenging in viability terms and following the submission of a viability assessment, Planning Officers agreed that the scheme was not financially viable. They weighed up the economic, social and environmental benefits of the application and concluded that the benefits would outweigh the impacts. Obligations to mitigate the impacts of the development on infrastructure were not sought.

Planning Officers worked with PCH to tailor the S106 to take a forward thinking, pragmatic approach and overage clauses were included in line with policy in the very unlikely event that development viability would have dramatically improved by the time of the completion of the open market properties.

The tender for Phase 3 was let on a two-stage design and build basis. Stage 1 selection was based 40/60% in favour of quality with particular emphasis on wider social gain and design quality. Following the selection process, PCH underwrote the pre-construction development fees to finalise the design and project cost which were then fixed at the second stage when the design and build contract was entered into to deliver Phase 3. This ensured that the scheme was delivered on budget and was counted as a success by all partners involved.

The project was largely delivered on time. Delays were only experienced in the developer handover of the flats at the scheme to due to changes in fire door regulation.

Please note that this case study has been taken from their entry form and so RTPi does not take responsibility for accuracy of contents. Readers are encouraged to undertake further research into the project which is likely to have developed since the time that this entry was written.