

Research: report

Neighbourhood watch

Building new communities: learning lessons from the Thames Gateway



Shelter

Foreword

Eddie MacDonald



Over the next decade, thousands of homes will be built in new developments across the country, including in eco-towns, growth areas and growth points. Expectations for these homes are high: that they are well designed; that they meet tougher environmental standards; and that they include a significant proportion of affordable homes. Further, they must deliver successful and sustainable communities.

Shelter wanted to find out how recent developments are functioning as communities, and commissioned research looking at three case study areas in the Thames Gateway, the largest and most high profile of the growth areas.

While there was satisfaction among residents with their new homes, there was often disappointment over the lack of delivery of crucial elements for the creation of community – such as public transport, local shops and services, and community facilities. The gaps between what was planned and delivered has had a strong impact on residents, and highlighted the very real challenges that exist for all new developments.

For developments to function effectively, residents need clear and integrated housing management structures, to ensure effective maintenance and equal treatment across tenures. Local services must be delivered from the outset – either through social enterprise models or interim measures, until a development has the ‘critical mass’ for market models to be viable. And planners and developers need to work with all tenures, including the private rented sector.

These are not insurmountable obstacles; but it is vital that we put these lessons into practice now in order to reap the benefits of highly functioning new communities in the future.



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Contents

Summary	6	Planning and delivering affordable housing	24
Introduction	7	Key findings	24
Aims and methodology	8	Affordable housing requirements	24
Key aims	8	Private renting – the invisible tenure	24
Methodology	8	Market failure can lead to more social housing	25
The three case study areas	9	Riverside views and mixed-tenure housing	25
		Pepper potted v separate blocks	25
Developing homes where people want to live	10	Conclusions and recommendations	26
Key findings	10	Conclusions	26
Why people moved to new developments	10	Recommendations	27
People’s views on their homes	11	Appendix	28
Resident consultation	12		
Mixed-tenure developments and management issues	12		
Single management systems – a more streamlined approach?	13		
Management boards and resident involvement	13		
Responsiveness of management companies	14		
Paying for maintenance	14		
Meeting housing and support needs	16		
Key findings	16		
The extent of housing needs	16		
Resolving housing problems	16		
Support needs not incorporated in planning of new developments	17		
Developing new neighbourhoods	18		
Key findings	18		
Community development and involvement	18		
Community halls and centres	19		
Play spaces	20		
Community cohesion	21		
Transport	21		
Local shops	22		
A local school	22		
Health facilities	23		

Summary

The Government has committed to build three million new homes by 2020¹, and new developments – including in growth areas such as the Thames Gateway – will have a significant role to play in meeting this goal. Having helped to secure that commitment, Shelter is focused on ensuring that enough of the new housing is affordable², and, crucially, that the Government delivers on promises of achieving sustainable and mixed communities. Shelter commissioned the London East Research Institute (LERI), at the University of East London (UEL), to carry out a study examining three developments in the Thames Gateway. The report compares the plans and policies of developers and housing managers with the experiences and perspectives of residents living in and around the new developments. While the research focused on three particular developments, many of the findings are intended to apply more generally to new housing developments and regeneration initiatives across the country, particularly where there is a significant proportion of affordable housing.

The research took a participatory approach, with the findings from doorstep interviews informing the topics for group discussions with residents. This identified a general satisfaction with individual homes and an appreciation of the wider landscapes that had been enhanced by developers on the three schemes. Moving into their new homes had, for the vast majority of residents, improved their housing situation.

However, residents were concerned about their wider neighbourhoods and disappointed with the level of support and services available. The research identified a range of issues relating to housing management in mixed-tenure developments, ranging from clarity about responsibilities of the different agencies, through to the affordability of service charges and perceived inequities between tenure groups, which all impact on the experience of living in Thames Gateway developments. However, it is important to note that these problems and the way they manifested themselves varied from scheme to scheme. Despite a perception from policy makers that residents would be feeling ‘consultation fatigue’, most residents indicated that their views on their neighbourhood had never been sought.

Registered social landlords (RSLs) had different approaches to supporting residents. While residents who had RSL landlords were more likely to have access to systems to meet their needs, many felt they had to leave the local area to get this support. There were no development-wide systems in place to support those with particular needs, such as health or housing problems. It was also apparent that good design of the layout of a development has a positive contribution to make to improving social networks and neighbour relations.

On two of the schemes, there was a failure to invest in community development. One development had numerous pre-existing resident-led community organisations and many new residents joined these. The research identified both the failure to factor in key services and a time-lag in service provision, even where it was planned, due to tensions over reaching a ‘critical mass’ of residents for private business to be viable. There was clearly space for social/not-for-profit enterprise to play a greater role here.

It was difficult to differentiate homes that were owned by an RSL or for sale on the open market, though prime riverside views tended to be reserved for owner-occupiers. Residents on one scheme were concerned that both the quality of housing and ongoing maintenance were inferior for those living in affordable housing.

There was a gap between plan and outcome in different ways on all three schemes. On two of the three schemes levels of affordable housing exceeded the level stipulated in the original masterplan, due to a change in targets. Two of the schemes described themselves as ‘urban villages’, although the idea of an ‘urban village’ was only followed through in a coherent way in one of the schemes. Despite the lack of infrastructure, all three schemes described themselves as ‘mixed use’ developments.

Masterplans and planning documents tend to reinforce the notion that there is a bi-tenure model of housing, ie owner occupation and affordable housing. The private rented sector is often forgotten, despite taking up a considerable proportion of tenures in one development, and this can cause management problems with the number of different agencies involved.

1 CLG, *Homes for the future: more affordable, more sustainable*, Cm 7191, 2007.

2 Affordable housing refers to homes that are social rented or acquired under a low-cost home ownership scheme.

Introduction

The last few years have seen significant increases in both public (RSL) and private housebuilding after a steady decline in the numbers of new homes built in the 1990s. This upturn has been driven to a significant degree by the Government, and a renewed emphasis on affordable housing has led to increased targets for affordable housing of up to 50 per cent in some areas.

In 2003, the growth areas were announced in the Government's sustainable communities plan.³ The aim of this initiative was to provide 200,000 additional sustainable homes by 2016. The growth areas will also play a key role in achieving the planned three million new homes by 2020, announced in the 2007 Housing Green Paper.⁴

The Thames Gateway is the largest and most high-profile of the growth areas, even before the winning Olympic bid. It covers a 40-mile corridor from East London to Southend, either side of the Thames, and is the largest housing and regeneration project underway in Western Europe. In addition to housebuilding and refurbishment, the Thames Gateway aims to regenerate local economies, labour markets, and transport links, thereby establishing mixed and sustainable communities. It is clear that the current economic climate will make this building commitment more of a challenge, but no less important to deliver.

However, the Government admits that the housing that has been built to date could have been of a higher quality, included more family housing, and linked more effectively to economic regeneration.⁵ Research in the Thames Gateway by the Institute of Public Policy Research also recommended a much greater role for community development, in light of some identified tensions between new and long-standing residents.⁶

The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment's (CABE) audit of new housing developments outside of London points to three main areas of weakness: place making – a lack of identity or fit with surroundings; layout – lack of distinction between public and private land, and difficult to navigate; and public space – dominant roads, and open spaces poorly designed or maintained.⁷

Further research commissioned by CABE⁸ concluded that, while the vast majority of people moving into new housing developments tend to be satisfied with their actual homes, this did not always follow through to satisfaction with the development and the wider environment. Customer research carried out by housebuilders tends to be carried out too soon after they have moved into a new home and therefore can give misleadingly positive results. This CABE research also found significant discrepancies between the perceptions of developers and residents.

The recent *Williams Report*⁹ was key to our research concerns, as it examined the role of affordable housing in the Thames Gateway. The three key challenges set out by the Williams Commission were: quality of design, good infrastructure, and responsiveness to the environment. The role of social housing was considered vital in delivering the mixed and sustainable communities planned for the Thames Gateway. The geographic location of social rented homes was also considered key, with pepper-potting the favoured approach. The report recommended that developers should aim to blend tenures and for distinctions between tenures to be hard to notice. Assistance to gain employment and other support services were also key tools.

It is widely acknowledged that involving the local community in the planning and building stage can lead to better outcomes for residents and housing managers.¹⁰

This study aims to explore how the issues raised here have been factored into new developments in the Thames Gateway, and sets out what recommendations can be taken forward for future developments.

3 Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, *Sustainable communities: building for the future*, 2003.

4 CLG, *Homes for the future: more affordable, more sustainable*, Cm 7191, 2007.

5 DCLG, *Thames Gateway interim plan: policy framework*, 2006.

6 Bennett, J, and Morris, J, *Gateway people: the aspirations and attitudes of prospective and existing residents of Thames Gateway*, Institute of Public Policy Research, 2006.

7 CABE, *Housing audit: assessing the design quality of new housing in the East Midlands, West Midlands and South West*, 2007.

8 Harvey, A, and Westbury, P, *A sense of place: what residents think of their new homes*, CABE, 2007.

9 CABE, *The Williams report – Quality first: the Commission on the design of affordable housing in the Thames Gateway*, 2007.

10 Such as, Royal Town Planning Institute, *Guidelines on effective community involvement and consultation*, good practice note 1, 2006, and Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF), *Community participation and empowerment: putting theory into practice*, 1994.

Aims and methodology

Key aims

- To compare the plans and policies of developers (public and private) and local authorities, with the experience and perceptions of residents in three areas within the Thames Gateway region.
- To understand how the housing and support needs of residents and their views about their neighbourhoods are incorporated into the regeneration and development process, and how this could be improved.
- To examine the form and impact of mixed-tenure policies in the case study areas.
- To establish a set of recommendations which could be used to inform and improve future developments in the Thames Gateway and beyond.

Methodology

There were three stages to the research process in each case study area.

Desk research

This involved a review of relevant documents, such as planning committee reports, section 106 agreements¹¹ and design guides. This enabled us to develop a more detailed understanding of what was envisaged for each scheme.

Participatory appraisal research with residents

A participatory approach to the research was taken to give residents a greater voice in representing their views about their neighbourhoods. There were two key criteria that informed this part of the research process. The researchers wanted to ensure that Shelter spoke to a representative sample of residents, including those who had not

necessarily participated in events/discussions about their neighbourhood. Therefore, an extensive recruitment campaign was adopted (described in more detail in the Appendix, page 28), along with a participative awareness approach, to ensure that the agenda was led by residents.

The participatory appraisal events focused on the key issues identified during the doorstep interviews. Broad themes were pursued during these sessions that explored residents' views on their neighbourhood pre- and post-development; experiences of mixed communities; community networks/cohesion; community support; housing and support needs; and access to housing, services, amenities and infrastructure. Each participant completed an in-depth questionnaire that focused in more detail on their views and experiences of the neighbourhood and their housing and support needs.

Identifying suitable venues was difficult and in Ingress Park a more detailed questionnaire that incorporated some of the themes identified at previous events had to be used instead, as well as more detailed questions on housing and support needs.

Interviews with policy makers

The third stage of the research process involved interviews with policy makers in the three case study areas. Eighteen interviews were undertaken with developers, planners, local councillors, relevant personnel from RSLs, residents' representatives, and other relevant people. An interview schedule was designed and these interviews were informed in part by the issues raised by the residents in that area.

¹¹ Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act is the provision under which planning obligations are agreed and those obligations are enforceable by the local authority or injunctions from the courts.

The three case study areas

Shelter and the research team at UEL wished to identify case study areas that were of a significant size, at varying stages of completion, and both within and outside the London part of the Thames Gateway.

Greenwich Millennium Village (GMV), South East London

The outline planning application for this scheme was submitted in 1998 and included plans for 1,377 homes, although it has now more than doubled and is expected to include 2,950 homes when complete. The site of the Millennium Village development comprises 44 acres, and is located on the Greenwich peninsula, in close proximity to the O2 centre (formerly the Millennium Dome). Since 2000, more than 800 units have been completed.

The scheme was one of a number of millennium projects, developed in conjunction with English Partnerships, which were intended to serve as a template for good practice, in relation to design principles that tested out high density living, eco-friendly principles, and 'mixed communities'. English Partnerships encouraged developers to compete to win the contract. Despite its commitment to 'mixed communities', the proportion of affordable housing initially agreed in the section 106 agreement was 20 per cent. However, that figure has increased over time.

Gallions Reach Urban Village (GRUV), South East London

The outline planning application for this scheme was submitted in 1997 and included plans for 1,500 units, that was later increased to 1,850 units. The site of more than 55 hectares was developed by a consortium of private developers. Between 2000 and 2005, more than 1,850 units were built and are now completed. The scheme is adjacent to Thamesmead Housing Estate, an area with relatively high levels of deprivation, and includes a number of interesting features, such as an eco-park. The initial section 106 agreement included a commitment to provide ten per cent affordable housing; however, the actual figure was much higher.

Ingress Park, Dartford, Kent

The outline planning application for this scheme, submitted in 1999, was to build 950 homes. The Ingress Park scheme was built on a 72-acre site that also includes Ingress Abbey, which was previously derelict but has since been restored and is now used as offices. The requirement to refurbish Ingress Abbey as part of the section 106 agreement resulted in a lower level of affordable housing – ten per cent. The scheme has good road links and is in close proximity to Ebbsfleet International Station and the Dartford Crossing. The final stage of the scheme is near completion. However, as in the case of GMV, there are plans to further extend this site.

Developing homes where people want to live

The research explored why people moved to the new Thames Gateway developments; their perspectives on living in these new developments; and the contribution housing management makes towards successful regeneration. A need was identified to assess the impact of high quality environments on the overall cost of housing on schemes such as these.

Key findings

- There was a high level of resident satisfaction with their new homes.
- These homes offered a way of people improving their housing situation.
- The quality of, and approach to, ongoing housing management is a key factor in successful regeneration.
- There is tension between the desirability of high levels of public space and the cost of its ongoing maintenance. Issues with the cost of service charges were common among residents on two developments.

Why people moved to new developments

The majority of residents we spoke to had moved into one of the new developments to improve their housing situation.

For many people in social housing the move had resolved a previous housing problem, such as overcrowding. However, longer-standing residents living in the area around the new development could see little tangible benefit to them. There had been no specific schemes to ensure that these residents might access the new housing and while some residents referred to physical improvements to the area, others felt it had become more overcrowded and that they were now in a position of competing with these new residents for scarce resources.

At Greenwich Millennium Village (GMV), residents had purchased properties because of: its close proximity to Canary Wharf; its green credentials; and its location next to the river. However, two residents felt that the placement was unsuitable and had exacerbated their physical or mental health problems. As one resident explained: 'I have chronic medical conditions and I am not suppose[d] to live in a high rise block.' For others, this move had solved long-term housing problems.

Case study: Debbie

Debbie has been living in GMV for four years. She rents her two-bedroom flat from Moat Housing Association, and lives with her son who attends the local primary school. After suffering years of homelessness and poor health, Debbie finally feels that she has found stability and security on this estate. Crucially, she says that her mental health has improved. Her son is growing up in an area where he is happy and safe to play outside and walk to school. This makes her feel better about herself emotionally and that she is being a good parent.

At Ingress Park, the research found that the main motivation for choosing to move to the area was that it offered a more spacious property at an affordable price. For the majority of those living in social housing the move had enabled them to resolve an overcrowding or homelessness problem.

People's views on their homes

Residents on all three developments appreciated their spacious homes in riverside locations with high levels of public space. However, there appeared to be some concerns about the growth of developments over time, in relation to views, levels of open space and a general sense of overcrowding. There was also a perception among some residents that demands for more affordable housing had resulted in social housing of a more inferior quality. Each development had proceeded in stages and it was clear that some stages were more popular than others.

At Gallions Reach Urban Village (GRUV) there had been a stipulation in the section 106 agreement that housing should be built to Parker Morris standards.¹² This has resulted in spacious houses and apartments with good storage space, which was appreciated by residents.¹³ At Ingress Park there was a generally high level of satisfaction with the homes, although there were some conflicting views.

'It is a good place to bring my kids up. The houses are okay, they are not made of cardboard like a lot of modern houses.'

Resident, Ingress Park

Residents at both GMV and Ingress Park observed that the relatively high-density housing was offset by the large areas of public space.

'I think it is so well designed, we have so many open areas, river walks, a number of parks within the area, and every block has a play area.'

Resident, GMV

Both GRUV and GMV incorporated 'green' or 'eco' elements to their schemes. At GRUV the scheme included 37 eco-homes available for social renting that had a range of energy-saving features. At GMV the scheme also embraced many eco-features, such as more efficient energy systems and insulation; a range of targets related to construction; and an aim to be fully integrated with public transport to reduce the use of cars. It was clear that both the eco-homes at GRUV and at GMV attracted residents who wanted to embrace 'green living'. There was clearly some disappointment at GMV that the scheme had not matched expectations in relation to its green credentials.

'We were told that combined heating and power system would generate electricity that would be sold back to the grid, but it did not have an mpan number... we were going to have solar power but they decided it was not cost efficient, there are no wind turbines, the reuse of water never happened. I am personally disappointed in the eco part of the housing. However, the eco park is a great success.'

Resident, GMV

Another concern that was identified by residents at both GRUV and GMV related to the encroachment of space as development proceeds. At GRUV, residents described how when they moved in they had plenty of open space and sometimes riverside views, but how these had diminished over time.

'When we first moved in five years ago it was all fields... Now suddenly it's houses, blocks and apartments built in front of houses.'

Resident, GRUV

At GMV, some residents also raised concerns about the potential over-development of the site following the decision to almost double the size of the scheme, and the potential impact on community space. There was an acknowledgment by both residents and one of the developers that as levels of affordable housing had increased, the quality of it had decreased.

'When they first started building they had nice double doors that opened and proper windows that opened. But the next block... they cut all the corners. Suddenly they didn't have windows that opened. A lot of the windows don't open...'

Resident, GMV

¹² Space standards that were mandatory in social and new town housing from the 1960s to 1980s. Parker Morris Committee, *Homes for today and tomorrow*, 1961.

¹³ English Partnerships recently announced the first significant advance on space standards since Parker Morris, and these are reportedly ten per cent more generous. See English Partnerships, 'English Partnerships calls for action on housing quality', news release, 26 February 2008.

‘We wanted to build affordable homes for real people. Initially we built houses with gardens, that were affordable, but then we began building much higher densities, which is not what we want to build and it is not what people want to live in.’

Developer, GRUV

Resident consultation

Prior to commencing this research, officers involved in housing management on two of the three schemes felt there may be a low response rate as residents had already been engaged in many consultation exercises, which might be described as consultation fatigue. However, most residents participating in the research said that their views on their neighbourhood had never been sought. It seems clear that while there may be systems of consultation based on residents’ associations or residents’ panels, these will always be limited in representing the population of a development, and therefore more inclusive measures should be built in to follow up on residents’ experiences and to capture the full range of perspectives.

Mixed-tenure developments and management issues

Mixed-tenure schemes, by definition, will have more than one interested party involved in the ongoing management of the scheme. Across the three developments, it was clear that from a user or resident perspective it is important to clarify management responsibilities prior to residents moving into new developments.

On the three developments reviewed, the number of agencies involved in the ongoing management of the scheme ranged from one to at least six. Both policy makers and residents were in agreement that more complex models of management, whereby a range of agencies were involved with the day-to-day management of the scheme, were not responsive to resident concerns.

Complex management arrangements

The problems arising from more complex management systems were most apparent at GRUV. There, three private developers were involved with the scheme, and each developer had appointed a separate management company to administer the ongoing maintenance. In addition, there

were two RSLs operating on site with their own management arrangements, and a landowner who owned pockets of land across the scheme. This has created communication difficulties for local residents, who are never sure who is responsible for what, and has contributed to a sense of neglect on the development. This weakness in management was acknowledged by both residents and policy makers. One resident was keen to show us the poor maintenance of the local lake and hill where benches have been vandalised, and rubbish was piled high.

‘I used to take my neighbour’s dogs for a walk on the hill, but because of all the syringes lying about, I stopped bringing them up. The trouble is when you phone someone to come and clear it up they say it is not their responsibility.’

Resident, GRUV

The manager of the local RSL also identified the problem of confusion of roles.

‘I think there is a lack of understanding about who is responsible for what... on one phase, there are three separate estate agreements and three separate management companies each set up by different developers. I think... it should be done on a single management model now.’

RSL Manager, GRUV

Buy to let as a management issue

GRUV was the only case study area with significant levels of dissatisfaction among residents. This dissatisfaction was not with the housing per se, but was the result of what has been described as a ‘buy-to-let scandal’. Developers sold large numbers of properties to buy-to-let investors, some with fraudulent mortgages, and some who did not pay the mortgages and were subsequently repossessed. While the fieldwork was being undertaken, recruiters were shocked by the sense of decline in these nearly new blocks. Whole corridors were empty, and sometimes one resident lived amid several boarded up flats. Crime was also reported as a problem, with residents claiming that their doors had been kicked in. Residents who had bought riverside flats found themselves in negative equity, and most residents interviewed in these parts were not planning to stay for very long. The local RSL had begun purchasing the vacant properties with the intention of bringing more stability to the area.

The situation was further complicated at GRUV by the high rate of all types of private renting and the unaccountability of what residents described as 'rogue landlords'. The complications arising from buy to let on that site have led to calls to limit the proportion of buy-to-let properties sold on any one scheme. However, respondents were mixed as to whether restrictions should be put in place. At GRUV one whole block was sold to one buy-to-let landlord and it was generally accepted that this was not desirable. However, a number of commentators expressed caution about the possibility of including a clause to restrict subletting, because they felt it might have a detrimental impact on sales.

While private renters were present on all three developments, the extent of private renting was much lower on the other two developments than in GRUV. One possible explanation is that GMV was developed at a much slower pace, with fewer properties being built across the same period, therefore without the oversupply of properties that had clearly resulted at GRUV where developers needed to sell urgently. However, another explanation given in relation to the proportionately lower private renting at GMV was that properties were more expensive and therefore the profit margins were not attractive for buy-to-let landlords.

Single management systems – a more streamlined approach?

The management arrangements for ongoing maintenance at GMV and Ingress Park were based on a single management system for the whole development. The management companies did not undertake the management task themselves but sub-contracted with a separate company. This resulted in a less complicated interface for residents, because it meant that they had only one point of contact.

'In GMV there are a lot more common areas including the streets within the villages that are going to remain privately owned. Therefore there was a greater need to have a management company that was responsible for all the common parts... to achieve the standards that people desire. Management is a hugely important aspect of good design, if something isn't managed properly it can be a total failure.'

Developer, GMV

Management boards and resident involvement

The intention was that the management companies on GMV and Ingress Park would be run by residents. Each owner-occupier is a member of the management company; those renting social housing are not individual members but the RSL holds a block vote. The management company has a management board and on both developments the intention is that decisions will eventually be determined by the residents.

However, management decisions had not yet passed to residents on either scheme. On Ingress Park, which was nearly complete, this had created dissatisfaction because it meant that the developer controlled 51 per cent of the vote for the management board and therefore had a veto with regard to decisions about the development.

At GMV and Ingress Park, residents spoke of a 'democratic deficit' in relation to the management of the respective boards. At GMV, residents were invited to apply to become members of the board. However, once appointed, they were not required to report back to other residents about decisions made by the board. Minutes of the board were not available to residents; and the chair of the local residents' association was not represented on the management board. At Ingress Park the more general lack of resident involvement meant that residents were unlikely to represent anyone other than themselves on the board.

At GMV, there was also dissatisfaction with the way the residents' association had been organised, they were currently unable to form a leaseholder association and therefore were denied the rights that this brings, such as appealing against service charges.

Nevertheless, while there were specific problems, it is fair to say that residents were happy with the overall standards and cleanliness at GMV. The main concern was the cost of maintenance, and a belief that the management company treated those residents who were socially renting in a different way to owner-occupiers.

While the existence of a single management structure does contribute to more effective day-to-day management of the scheme, there can still be concerns about the governance of the management board and the potential for differential treatment across tenures.

Responsiveness of management companies

A single management company does not necessarily resolve problems of repairs and issues that may arise within a property. On both GMV and Ingress Park, the RSL was responsible for repairs to individual properties for those who were social renting. Yet, the systems of management on both developments appeared quite remote. At GMV the RSL office was initially located some distance away, but had since been relocated nearer to the development.

At GMV there was some dissatisfaction with the local RSL: some residents claimed that the RSL was unresponsive to repair and maintenance problems, and that its staff were unprofessional and disrespectful to tenants. Residents also criticised the RSL for reacting to what they described as ‘pester power’ rather than addressing problems across the whole of their rented housing stock. There was a strong sense among residents that some residents were treated more favourably than others, both between and across tenures.

In general, those tenants who were socially renting appeared to be less satisfied with the management company than those who were owner-occupiers. The scheme employed security guards and some residents perceived this as a great help, whereas for others they felt that they were going to be reprimanded about where and how their children played.

‘My son gets told by the security and by other children and adults that if he goes into another courtyard he’ll be told to leave.’

Mother, GMV

At Ingress Park there appeared to be fewer problems in relation to the ongoing management of the scheme. Residents appeared to be happy with the overall maintenance of the site, with some residents referring to the high standards of cleanliness. Residents were less happy with the appointment of a private company to manage parking as they felt that, given the poor public transport links, there should be more parking provision. It was felt by residents that unpopular decisions like these were possible because of the dominance of the developer on the management board.

Paying for maintenance

One of the most striking features of all three developments was the high quality of public space. The riverside enhanced all three environments and riverside walkways had been developed on all three schemes, along with other public facilities. At GRUV residents have Gallions Hill and Gallions Lake; at GMV there is an ecology centre, two new park areas, lakes and communal gardens; and Ingress Park has woodland, parkland and an amphitheatre. However, high quality public space comes with additional maintenance costs, and this generates another set of issues about who is to pay for ongoing maintenance.

The issue of service charges appeared to be a particular problem at GRUV and GMV. At GRUV the problem had manifested in four ways. Firstly, the complex system of management made it difficult to collect charges to pay for services that were general to the scheme and this appeared to contribute to the neglect of common parts, such as removing rubbish from the local lake. Secondly, there was the issue of non-payment.

‘People have not paid their maintenance charges and one of the management companies has lost a lot of money down there because of that.’

Developer, GRUV

Thirdly, the high number of repossessed properties and rogue landlords contributed to this problem of non-payment; and, fourthly, there was the added cost that service charges brought to those living in social housing which had an impact on affordability. This was ameliorated by all three schemes having a cap on service charges for those in affordable housing; however, the affordability of service charges may not just be a problem for those living in social housing.

There was a clear tension at GRUV between maintaining open spaces and the implication of this for service charges.

‘Some of the things that are in section 106 agreements aren’t always helpful. It gets vandalised and the residents have to pay to maintain it. It is very expensive, people steal shrubs... it is public space but it is maintained by the service charge of the people, you won’t see the management companies from those areas doing things to make the area look great.’

Local Housing Manager, GRUV

The section 106 agreement for GRUV included a park as part of the planning gain, but this has still not been provided as there is an ongoing argument about who will run the park that is included in the agreement.

GMV included the most public space, along with a high level of maintenance, including window cleaning, security and maintenance of the pedestrianised walkways and communal gardens. It was on this development that service charges manifested themselves as one of the major concerns of residents. Owner-occupiers living on the development held the view that as more units were built overall maintenance charges would be reduced, but this had clearly not been the case.

Social renters felt that the high levels of service charges were simply not affordable and pushed them into a poverty trap. They also felt information provided to them when they moved into the scheme lacked clarity on the full extent of the cost of renting at GMV, when rent and service charges were added together. However, according to the RSL, they do not have records of any applicant refusing their offer because of affordability issues.

There are a range of agencies now working at GMV to resolve this issue but, even if a local resolution is reached, it highlights a much more complicated issue. This development opted for high quality public space and, over time, more housing on this scheme should be affordable, but this raises the question of who should pay the service charges.

‘If people cannot afford service charges maybe some sort of subsidy has to be considered but it would be wrong to relax the standards... If you do that it will depreciate the standards people have come to enjoy. I think the RSLs, along with Government, have got to find a way to deal with that issue.’

Developer, GMV

There was a feeling at GMV that the standard of communal areas had declined in later phases that included more affordable housing. At the participant appraisal events, residents across tenures felt that the size, design and planting in the shared courtyards that included more affordable housing was inferior.

At Ingress Park there was some discontent over service charges but it had not manifested itself as a substantial issue for local residents, and no particular concerns were raised over the standard of maintenance. The section 106 agreement included a cap on the rent and service charge for residents in affordable housing and, given that only ten per cent of the overall housing was affordable, this had not posed a problem. However, one issue that was raised was the tension between public spaces and private payment.

‘There is a significant amount of public realm^[14] and that has been an issue, because people from outside of the development come to visit so that they can enjoy that public realm... If you ask the majority of people I think what they would like is a gated development, [they would say] “we pay these charges why should other people benefit for something we have to pay for”.’

Developer, Ingress Park

There are clearly a number of possible responses to the issue over payment of service charges. One solution would simply be to reduce the quality of public space and this would clearly reduce the cost. A cap on service charges might be more applicable on schemes with a lower proportion of affordable housing. However, it might also create considerable tensions and may lead to inequities in terms of the quality of public space throughout the scheme and, in the process, single out different tenure groups.

14 According to the London Development Agency ‘public realm’ is the space between and within buildings that are publicly accessible, including streets, squares, forecourts, parks and open spaces.

Meeting housing and support needs

The research looked at the extent of housing need; the extent of support needs, such as disabilities, health problems and contact with social services; and how these needs were addressed. There is no obligation for planners and developers to factor in such needs, although RSLs would be expected to have procedures to identify and address most support needs once housing is occupied. The research explored these systems where they existed and identified ways they could be improved.

Key findings

- Two of the developments have a high proportion of residents with serious health problems and disabilities.
- Most residents need to travel out of their immediate area to have their support needs met.
- There are no unified systems in place to assess support needs of all residents.
- Few residents have current housing problems, because such problems have mostly been resolved by moving to the development.
- Good design and layout can promote positive relationships between neighbours, which is a crucial system of informal support.
- Residents who are socially renting are more likely to have processes in place for meeting their support needs than other residents, although each RSL approaches the issue of support needs in a different way.

The extent of housing needs

In the areas with a large number of social rented properties (GMV and GRUV), approximately one-third of the households in the sample included at

least one person with a disability or chronic health problem. In GMV and GRUV, the samples were evenly split between those reliant wholly or partially on benefits and those whose income was mainly from work. The extent of housing need varied across the three developments. At GMV, none of the sample identified themselves as being in housing need, though three households were experiencing difficulties paying their service charges. At Ingress Park, three respondents described themselves as living in overcrowded conditions. There were higher levels of overcrowding at GRUV, but this was mainly in the sample drawn from the adjacent estate.

Resolving housing problems

Most tenants referred any problems to their immediate landlords, and owner-occupiers to the developers. Two respondents, one who had previously been homeless and one who continued to be homeless at the time of the research, had liaised with specialist homelessness advisers. A smaller number of respondents cited the CAB as a place they would go for housing advice. Therefore, residents did not identify any one specific organisation that they could go to with a housing problem, and indeed there was scope for more information on housing advice.

Support needs not incorporated in planning of new developments

There was no unified system in place for assessing and responding to the potential support needs of residents. The onus appeared to be on the resident to contact the local authority and pursue assistance. However, needs assessments were more likely to be undertaken for those renting from a social landlord. At GRUV there were two RSLs providing housing on the development; one of those had a support system and the other would refer residents to the local authority.

At GMV there is a formal process of needs assessment in place, however, this only applies to those who are social renting. When the tenant has lived in the scheme for four weeks the housing officer meets with her/him and identifies ways in which they might support the tenant. The systems in place are more focused on enabling people to return to employment or education, as opposed to resolving other kinds of problems. Where other support needs are identified, residents are signposted to the relevant service/department. However, support was also provided on this development in less formal ways, such as through the presence of an onsite management office and design features such as communal gardens and courtyards to promote community cohesion.

Case study: Dorothy

Dorothy moved to GMV about two years ago to be near her daughter after her husband died. She lives alone in the house that she bought and has enough space for family to come and stay. She loves the neighbourhood because of the families who live around her. She enjoys watching the children playing, and says that it is a really peaceful place to live. She is pleased that her neighbours' children can play outside safely and is worried that compromises on the design of future homes may mean that other children don't enjoy the same privilege.

Dorothy is in her seventies, has severe mobility problems and has suffered from ill-health recently, which has meant several stays in hospital. For her, GMV is a very safe and secure place to live and the service from porters has made a huge difference to her quality of life.

Residents may sometimes present with complex needs and agencies need to support these needs in flexible ways.

Case study: Mariam

Mariam is in her thirties and has lived in Greenwich all her life. She is very happy living in the village and does not plan to move away. She is registered blind and has received training to help her move around the GMV area independently.

She and her family were one of the first families to move into a socially rented two-bedroom house at GMV because they were previously living in overcrowded accommodation. As her family grew she found that she was once again overcrowded. She applied to the housing association for a larger property. Moving to a new area was very tough for Mariam and eventually she and her husband realised that she needed to move back to GMV. After much pressure the housing association at GMV agreed to let a former show home to the family and they were able to move back. Mariam is now much happier.

At Ingress Park, needs assessments were more likely to be undertaken with social-renting tenants. The RSL visits each resident at the point of nomination and once they have been in the property for six weeks. These visits enable the RSL to identify any support needs and refer tenants to the In Touch Housing support service where necessary. In Touch Housing is provided to a range of RSLs and has specific eligibility criteria. Residents moving into Ingress Park are also given a leaflet on the support available and the process for self-referral to this service.

Developing new neighbourhoods

One of the overriding concerns of residents across all three developments was in relation to the provision of what they identified as key services, such as transport, education, shops and community facilities. This section examines the role of community development as a vehicle for successful regeneration, residents' perceptions of local services, and assesses why services have been slow to develop or are non-existent.

Key findings

- The provision of local services is very important to local residents, but the extent to which they were factored into the three developments varied.
- More emphasis needs to be given to community development. Successful community development requires places where residents and community groups can meet.
- More attention needs to be given to ensuring that new schemes bring benefits to those living in situations of relative deprivation adjacent to new developments.
- There is a time-lag between people moving into schemes and service provision.
- A market model currently operates in relation to the provision of local shops and cafes. However, it may not be profitable for private companies or individuals to provide shops, therefore more needs to be done to facilitate social enterprise.

Community development and involvement

Community development clearly has a role to play in helping people to feel less isolated. Across the three developments, huge variations in the level of community involvement were identified. Ingress Park has not undertaken any community development work, GRUV has previously relied on pre-existing community development organisations, and GMV has a specific strategy for this purpose. Residents have developed their own ways to provide support and advice to each other. However, a problem on all three developments was that there was nowhere to meet with residents, although GMV does have

current plans for community facilities to be provided in the next phase of development.

At GRUV there was no specific strategy for community development. There had been a sum of money allocated to community development as part of the section 106 agreement; however, there was no evidence that this had actually been spent. Community development had been resident-led, with local residents' groups responding to the adverse conditions generated by the complex management structure and the problems emanating from the buy-to-let sector.

'We formed lots of local neighbourhood watch groups that then became residents' associations. We were encouraging people to become more pro-active. We were giving people some support about who to contact, but we were struggling because this is a complicated area.'

Resident, GRUV

Since January 2007, a specific forum has been set up with residents, the local authority and a range of agencies involved in managing the scheme at GRUV. This forum has highlighted the importance of community development to bring about positive and more accountable change. From the perspective of the residents the problem was not with any one agency, but with the large number of agencies with different responsibilities.

At GRUV, local residents had also been involved in developing their own services to meet local need.

A local vicarage, located in one of the new houses, ran drop-in sessions for local residents. Another residents' association began organising an annual picnic and initiated a mother and toddler group. While the research identified a number of innovative grassroots initiatives, the participatory awareness events identified gaps in provision for older people and teenagers that a more formal community development strategy might address more effectively.

At Ingress Park, no specific community development strategies had been employed on the scheme or specifically budgeted for. However, the developer had organised an annual spring fair on the site. Some residents had taken on a community development role, one resident had set up a website for residents providing information on the scheme and surrounding area, and residents had developed email lists as a way of communicating with each other. A neighbourhood watch scheme had emerged on one part of the development in response to some antisocial behaviour, and this provided a forum for discussing issues on the estate. The RSL was also planning some community development work.

'We don't jump in straight away to do this, that and the other, we give them a chance to settle in, before we try and make some inroads and see whether there is any resident involvement we can do, such as setting up a residents' association or getting some of those people to join a residents' panel. We did some trips up to London for residents from this development and as a result they have come onto our residents' panel.'

RSL, Ingress Park

The development with the most comprehensive strategy for community involvement was at GMV. The strategy included a specific community development worker (this was time limited), a village website, and a residents' association (open to owner-occupiers as well as those in affordable housing), along with a range of community spaces to be included in later phases.

When the first residents moved in, the local RSL was commissioned to provide community development to residents across all tenures, as one of the particular goals of the scheme was to develop a successful mixed community across all tenures.

'We engaged a trained skilled person in setting up community groups and activities. As time went on the villagers got to know each other and they didn't need any help, they are doing it for themselves.'

Developer, GMV

In 2006, research undertaken by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation¹⁵ particularly praised the level of community development being undertaken on the GMV scheme and its contribution to promoting cohesion across tenures.

However, the community development worker role no longer exists, and the RSL now limits its role to social renters on the development. This has created some resentment from other residents and was clearly at odds with a vision of a tenure blind scheme.

Each of the RSLs in GMV and GRUV provided some sort of community development, meaning that only social housing tenants benefit from this. However, the RSL that manages the social housing at Ingress Park was willing to work across tenures, but found that on mixed-tenure estates there were often polarised management systems representing the two groups.

The research suggests that more comprehensive strategies do not necessarily lead to more satisfactory outcomes and a key issue that needs to be addressed on all of these developments is cross-tenure working.

Community halls and centres

One important dimension of community development is the provision of venues for residents to meet. Neither GRUV nor Ingress Park provided any community spaces for residents either in their plans or development of the scheme. GMV did factor in a range of community spaces, but they are unlikely to be completed for some time.

The failure to provide appropriate spaces makes it difficult to develop residents' associations, and posed particular challenges to this research project. Considerable difficulties were encountered in identifying suitable locations, and the researchers had to opt for doorstep interviews at Ingress Park because of the failure to identify a suitable venue.

¹⁵ Holmes, C, *Mixed communities: success and sustainability*, JRF, 2006.

At GRUV the development did not have its own purpose-built community centre or resident hall; however, there was a hall on the adjacent development, and there was some expectation that residents could also use this centre. Different explanations were posited for the failure to provide a community centre – ranging from ‘not wanting to place too many demands on developers’; ‘community centres not being fashionable at the time of the planning application’; and the existence of a community hall that was not utilised on the adjacent development.

‘Now I would put more local shops and facilities in to the design, rather than as the scheme evolves, they would be in the planning application... There are no new medical services down there so they have to cope with expanded demand, there is no building around that could be used for this.’

Lead Councillor, Greenwich LBC

At GMV there were an impressive array of community facilities in the masterplan, such as a community centre, pre-school provision, and a leisure square with play spaces for different aged children. However, the issue there had been the delay in providing these facilities, with developers focusing initially on developing the residential accommodation and some public spaces. In January 2008, the next phase of housing was agreed; however, it was stipulated that these facilities must be provided before this phase commenced. The local school was designated as a community facility in the interim, but access was difficult.

At Ingress Park there was no community venue. The British Legion had a social club located across from the development, which some residents had used to hold meetings. However, at the time of our research it was closed for redecoration. The developer has now submitted a planning application that involves the extension of the development and this will include a space to hold meetings.

Play spaces

Residents on all three developments valued the green space, but some residents felt that there was a lack of designated play spaces for children. At GRUV, the section 106 agreement included plans

for a new park, but approximately seven years after the residents have moved in, the scheme is still awaiting completion. One resident expressed the view that this was a substantial oversight and such provision may contribute to a reduction in antisocial behaviour.

‘I have a gang of boys kicking a ball against the back of my fence. If there was a space for them to play football they wouldn’t do that.’

Resident, GRUV

Policy makers did acknowledge this oversight and on a scheme that is being developed on a nearby site there are plans to include a range of play spaces for children of different age groups.

At GMV, there was meant to be a ‘leisure triangle’¹⁶, again reflecting the needs of different age groups, but this still hasn’t been built. Some parents expressed concern about the lack of designated play spaces. The only existing provision is in communal gardens; however, it was reported that residents living in one of the blocks had removed the play equipment following a vote. Therefore, those children living in blocks that do not include a play space will have to wait for the leisure triangle to be completed.

At Ingress Park, residents commented on the lack of nursery provision and play facilities for primary school children. Once again, the section 106 agreement did include a designated play space, but this had still not been provided.

Case study: Denisha

Denisha lives with her husband and their two small children. They bought a house at GRUV three years ago. Denisha likes the area but says that when she first moved there, she could not find anywhere to take her young son. Now children’s centres are beginning to open up and provision is improving but she is critical of how long this has taken. Denisha and her husband both work. Currently on maternity leave with their second child, she would like to return to work but is struggling to find childcare that she can afford within the GRUV area. Denisha believes that the local authorities need to address this lack of affordable childcare so that more women like her can find work.

16 The ‘leisure triangle’ is a spatial site on GMV that will provide a range of leisure facilities, including playgrounds, community centre, etc.

Community cohesion

The extent to which residents felt they got along varied across the three schemes. At GRUV, the huge array of resident groups indicate that people have different issues and some residents are already actively involved in the community. However, the research identified some resentment among white communities about the speed of change in relation to the ethnic make up of the whole Thamesmead area. There were tenure-based tensions between private renters (particularly those with buy-to-let landlords) and others, but this also had a racial dimension – problems associated with the buy-to-let sector were also linked to the African community, and this fuelled prejudice linking the arrival of African migrants and neighbourhood decline.

At GMV, the research identified tensions again; however, this time it was focused more on different tenure groups, and related to a sense that people in different tenures were not treated equally. Ironically, at Ingress Park there was the least resident involvement and community development, yet most residents reported that they got along well. However, there is clearly the potential for tensions as the RSL becomes more involved in this development and management passes to the residents.

Transport

The failure to provide an adequate public transport system emerged as an issue at both GRUV and Ingress Park. GMV had a restrictive approach to car ownership, but a strategy had been put in place to ensure that residents had access to a good range of bus services, as well as being located near a tube station.

At GRUV, residents were reliant on two local buses that served the area and this posed a particular challenge given that residents had to travel out of the area to access facilities. Residents reported considerable overcrowding on the buses. This had created tension between those who had moved into the area to live at GRUV and those who were already living there.

'[I]f you go to a bus stop in the area you can stand there while four or five go past. They'll all be full. It's just not adequate'.

Resident, GRUV

A review of planning documents relating to GRUV suggests that policy makers felt that the area was already well served for public transport. There had been a re-routing of bus services and bus stops across the development. Plans for a river transit service were referred to in initial planning documents, although these are not scheduled for completion until 2011. Given that the first residents had moved into the development in 2001 and that there was already a substantial local population, one would have expected a more coordinated approach to improving public transport links.

At GMV, there is an emphasis on environmental sustainability and a more strategic plan has been put in place to facilitate access to excellent public transport links. The development is within walking distance of an underground station and a large number of buses have been re-routed to pass through this area, giving residents the opportunity to use public transport. Residents are happy with the level of public transport, although some residents did express disappointment that given their proximity to major road schemes they were not able to make use of these because of restrictions on car usage.

At Ingress Park, the issue of both car ownership and poor public transport services was flagged up as a concern by residents. Parking was not limited in the same way as at GMV, but residents felt that parking provision both for residents and visitors was inadequate, given the lack of local services and poor bus routes, and were particularly unhappy about the employment of a private company to control parking on the development. The section 106 agreement had placed a requirement on the developer to provide a shuttle service to the local overground station during peak hours. However, the developer claimed that there had been a very low take-up of this service. The local bus service that served the development was infrequent and only stopped on the edge of the development. This was now being addressed through the provision of Fastrack¹⁷ which was being constructed at the time of this research.

¹⁷ Fastrack is a new high speed transport link being introduced in Kent Thameside to enable fast links to mainline stations that run more frequently. Fastrack will have priority on the road and will have specific tracks in places and dedicated bus links to reduce car usage and enable people to move around the area quickly.

Local shops

Residents on all three developments were located relatively near large shopping centres. However, many expressed a preference for a local shop where they could purchase items such as milk, newspapers and bread. Residents on one development expressed a desire for a laundrette.

At GRUV there were two shops. One was on the outskirts of the development and the other was on the pre-existing development. The parade of shops on the outskirts of the development was part of the overall scheme for GRUV, however a number of units were still vacant due to a lack of demand.

GRUV sprawls across a wide area and, therefore, the location of the shop is important. The decision to locate a shop on the outskirts of the development was driven by commercial considerations, because it was felt that this would make it a more attractive business proposition as it would attract passing trade. Currently the surrounding area has high levels of unemployment, and social enterprise should possibly have been considered as a way to further service provision.

GMV is a mixed-use development and includes the most comprehensive strategy for shop provision. Until recently, the development had subsidised a shop, but it had to be closed to build the Village Square, which will include retail outlets, cafes, restaurants, etc.

Residents on this development were concerned that potential proprietors might not be attracted to the development because parking restrictions would limit passing trade. They also hoped to have more input into the sorts of shops that might open.

‘There has been a lot of discussion about the leases for the shops. We wanted participation in choosing what sort of shops, but the developer felt that the market should decide. I thought a few units could have been put by at low cost, with shorter leases, to help start up new businesses such as coffee shops, there is a lot of energy here for people to run a community cafe.’

Resident, GMV

At Ingress Park the section 106 agreement included a requirement that the developer should market a facility that could operate as a convenience store

on completion of the first 650 units. However, the planning department had decided not to enforce this requirement at 650 units, because they felt it would not be viable as there was not a sufficient critical mass to make it an attractive business opportunity. There are renewed proposals to extend the development and this will include a shop and other facilities.

A local school

The section 106 agreement on each development contained a requirement for the provision of a local primary school. Residents were expected to travel out of the area for secondary schools and colleges.

At GRUV, developers were required to set aside a school site for a one-form entry primary school¹⁸ as part of the section 106 agreement, and review the need for provision after the completion of the first 900 units. The school is now near completion and admitted its first year group in September 2007, three years after the completion of the whole scheme and six years after the first residents moved in. However, it was clearly never intended to provide the school to coincide with the arrival of the first residents.

Both existing residents and those who have moved into the area to occupy the new housing were concerned about the lack of school provision. This has meant that some families have had to travel, which was described by some as a challenge given the poor bus service. Moreover, the admission of only one age group that will then grow through the school means that a parent with children of different ages will have to use two different schools.

At GMV they had an operational school on site as the first residents arrived and this school included the full range of year groups, making it easier for siblings to move directly into the school. English Partnerships, the government agency that was responsible for initiating development on the site and undertook much of the remediation work to prepare the site, also provided a local school and health centre. English Partnerships entered into a section 106 agreement with the London Borough of Greenwich, where they provided a school and a health centre. Negotiations were undertaken whereby a local school that was relatively close to the development was relocated. This gave the school an immediate intake, and for residents in housing need whose children attended the school this was a factor that was taken into consideration when allocating the socially rented housing on the scheme.

¹⁸ One-form entry relates to a single class of 30 children in each year group.

The presence of a school to coincide with the arrival of the first residents was unique and apparently had been the result of pressure from the developers on English Partnerships. From their perspective it made it much easier to attract families to the development, and it also helped to reinforce the sense of a community whereby children could walk to their local school. Residents in the main appreciated their local school, however, for some incoming residents it was not possible to get a place at the school and this meant travelling out of the area to attend a local school.

At Ingress Park it appears that initial plans to provide a school have now been abandoned. The section 106 agreement for this development required developers to provide a site for a primary school. Construction was to have commenced in 2002 and been completed by 2003. However, Kent County Council, which would have been the agency with responsibility for developing the site and which requested that this be included when the planning application was first being considered, has since argued that there is existing capacity in other schools.

Health facilities

Clearly, residents living in new developments need to access a local GP practice or health centre. However, neither GRUV or Ingress Park included any specific buildings or financial contribution to health service provision. Planning departments would have consulted health authorities about the proposed development and it would have been up to them to identify a need. At GRUV, a number of residents highlighted the lack of facilities.

‘... it’s not sane to suggest that a massive [new] community that’s increased in size here can squeeze themselves into those [old] facilities.’

Resident, GRUV

At GMV, the argument for a new health centre was more readily acceptable given that there were no local services for existing populations to use, and therefore a new health centre was built that contributed to a sense of community in the local area.

At Ingress Park, a number of residents specifically mentioned that they would like a GP surgery on the development. Plans have recently emerged for a GP surgery and an extra care centre for older people as part of the extension of the scheme.

‘We felt it would add to the diversity of the development to create some elderly care provision... quite a few operators... put together that combination of a pharmacy, a surgery and extra care in a single building and those uses feed off and associate with each other very well, we are looking to partner up with one of those.’

Developer, Ingress Park

However, the failure to more effectively factor in these facilities does have an impact on people with health problems.

Case study: Angela

Angela moved to Ingress Park a year ago to take up a new job in London. She is currently renting privately and does not know if she will be able to remain in her one-bedroom flat beyond the next six-month let.

Angela agrees that there is a lack of local community facilities but goes on to say that she is not troubled by this as she enjoys the quiet anonymity of the area. It is not unfriendly but people mainly keep to themselves, which she likes. Angela suffers from a long-term chronic illness which means she needs to see the doctor frequently. Access to the surgery and also the train station are awkward for pedestrians, she says, because the estate lacks pathways between different parts of the estate. For car users this is not a problem, but for Angela this adds 15 minutes to each journey because she has to walk the long way round using the roads.

Planners interviewed suggested this situation had changed and health authorities were now more effectively feeding into planning applications to identify the need for additional monies and facilities.¹⁹

¹⁹ Both the London Borough of Greenwich and Dartford Borough Council now claim to adopt a more comprehensive approach to ensuring that adequate levels of support services are factored into new developments, this is achieved in part through the active involvement of relevant departments in the respective authorities. In Greenwich this new approach is outlined in *Planning obligations: supplementary planning document: annexes* (2008); in Dartford this has not been formalised in a planning document but is evident in more recent planning applications, such as the recent Eastern Quarry application.

Planning and delivering affordable housing

The delivery of affordable housing was examined in detail on these three schemes. Issues such as delivery against plans, and the barriers and restraints on building affordable housing are covered.

Key findings

- There was a difference between plan and outcome on two of the three schemes – targets for the proportion of affordable housing increased during the course of the developments, meaning more was provided than in the original plans.
- Affordable housing tends to be provided later than other housing in new developments.
- Assumptions about housing tenure in planning documents reinforce the notion of a bi-tenure system, ie owner occupation and affordable housing, and this may create problems for both the management of private rented accommodation, and the inclusion of private renters, in systems of housing governance.
- Despite a commitment to mixed-tenure developments, more desirable properties were likely to be reserved for owner-occupiers.

Affordable housing requirements

The Thames Gateway developments were all agreed in the late 1990s, prior to more recent commitments to maximise the provision of affordable housing, and therefore the level of affordable housing agreed at the outset was considerably below the level that would be expected today. At GRUV and Ingress Park developers were required to make ten per cent of the development affordable housing, which was lower than that stipulated in their respective unitary development plans (UDPs) at the time. At GRUV this was justified on the basis of a desire to alter the tenure mix in an area of predominantly rented housing and at Ingress Park because of the high costs linked to the restoration of Ingress Abbey. At GMV the proportion of affordable housing was set by English Partnerships at 20 per cent.

However, at both GRUV and GMV the scheme was submitted in phases, and later phases were affected by the London Plan requirements for higher proportions of affordable housing, which has resulted in the overall level of provision of affordable housing at GMV increasing to 30 per cent. Ingress Park is proposing to extend its scheme, and this phase will include 30 per cent affordable housing, in line with Dartford's modified affordable housing policy.

Affordable housing comes later

While each scheme included affordable housing, it was never provided in the first phase. This was explained by developers in relation to the need to maximise profit from earlier phases in order to subsidise the affordable housing. However, at GMV it seemed that as later stages of the scheme included substantially more residents in affordable housing, this appeared to coincide with emerging tensions across tenure groups.

Private renting – the invisible tenure

The research indicated that there were significant proportions of residents privately renting, the highest proportion of which was at GRUV. However, both plans and management structures tend to assume a bi-tenure owner occupation/affordable housing model.

There may be scope for factoring private renting into new developments to create management systems that avoid the kinds of problems experienced at GRUV. However, there is also the issue of representation. As we have seen, management structures also assume this bi-tenure model and this may lead to the exclusion of private renters from effective representation.

Market failure can lead to more social housing

The plan for GRUV was to alter the tenure mix by providing more owner-occupied housing. One phase of the scheme did not attract sufficient owner-occupiers and a number of properties were sold to buy-to-let landlords, many of which were later repossessed due to widespread fraud. This led to interventions by RSLs that purchased these properties and converted them to social rented or shared ownership properties, therefore increasing the proportion of affordable housing on the scheme.

Riverside views and mixed-tenure housing

One of the most desirable features of the Thames Gateway developments is their proximity to the river. However, it is clear that riverside views have been mainly reserved for owner-occupiers.

At GRUV the riverside housing was described by one policy maker as the 'jewel in the crown' of the scheme and therefore was initially reserved for owner-occupiers. However, it was this phase that encountered problems with buy to let, and RSLs intervened to purchase repossessed properties. Therefore, while not initially intended as affordable housing, the outcome has been that at least some of the houses with riverside views are now social housing.

At GMV, ensuring that tenure did not determine the housing a person received ('tenure blindness') was an important dimension of the masterplan. However, this was not always a realistic target.

'We haven't got roof top apartments on the river as affordable housing, the reality for us is that we are trying to make things pay and you seek to do the very best you can... our mixed spread of tenure that has been achieved to date has been highly successful but I have to admit that the very highest value homes were not allocated as affordable housing.'

Developer, GMV.

At Ingress Park, a small number of shared ownership units were located on the riverside. However, on this scheme the lower proportion of affordable housing was explained by the fact that most of the affordable housing was family housing and this was not located by the river.

Pepper potted v separate blocks

The location of affordable housing within the developments was analysed, to determine whether it was located in distinct blocks or pepper potted throughout the scheme. GRUV was developed by a number of players and one of these was an RSL that managed specific blocks across the development. However, the decision to purchase flats in other blocks has meant that there is an unintended pepper-potting. According to one of the developers, they sought out RSLs to work with who preferred distinct blocks, as they felt pepper-potting did not work.

At GMV, affordable housing was dispersed into particular blocks in specific locations and this would have been important given its commitment to tenure blindness. However, there was some concern that these were generally the lower-value blocks and, at Ingress Park, the section 106 agreement stipulated that affordable housing should be spread throughout the scheme. Clearly, the management of integrated or pepper potted housing would be easier to manage on schemes with a single management structure.

Conclusions and recommendations

The research highlights satisfaction from residents with their new Thames Gateway homes, but ongoing problems with other parts of the developments and how they are managed. Those responsible for planning, designing and delivering new housing shared some similar concerns with residents about parts of the development.

Conclusions

Developing homes where people want to live

- There was a high level of resident satisfaction with their new homes, which often offered a way for people to improve their housing situation. Generally, residents were positive about the amount of space, good location and, on one development, high building standards with good storage. For some, moving to these developments had a very positive impact on their health, security and peace of mind.
- Residents valued a range of measures that had been undertaken to enhance their neighbourhood, such as lakes, riverside walkways and green spaces.
- Despite a perception from policy makers that residents would be feeling 'consultation fatigue', most residents did not feel their views had been actively sought. Some, particularly social tenants, perceived a lack of democracy in decision-making procedures, despite the developments all aiming to involve residents.
- The quality of ongoing housing management is a key factor in successful regeneration. Both residents and policy makers agree that on mixed developments with complex management structures it is harder to deliver a coherent service response to residents.
- Public space must be maintained, and in one study area there was a common feeling that this was neglected. High levels of public space are expensive to maintain, and the amount and value for service charges was a common issue for residents in two of the study areas. Additionally, more attention needs to be given to ensuring that new schemes bring benefits to those living in situations of relative deprivation adjacent to new developments.

Meeting housing and support needs

- There were no development-wide systems in place for assessing the support needs of residents in the three study areas, but more advice and guidance was available for those who were socially renting. Although developers are not required to provide such assessment, there was a clear need: in two of the study areas we examined approximately one-third of residents had serious health problems or disabilities, and many had to travel outside their neighbourhoods for support.
- There was evidence that good layout and design of buildings and public spaces can promote positive relationships between neighbours, which is a crucial system of informal support.

Developing new neighbourhoods

- The local provision of good infrastructure and services is very important to residents, but the extent to which they were factored into the three developments varied, and there was often a time-lag between people moving into schemes and service provision.
- One study area had very good access to local transport, but in the other two developments the lack of transport networks was a significant problem for residents. Plans to improve access to transport were in place across all three areas, but this was too late for those who had already lived there for some time.
- The establishment of local shops and cafes has also suffered from a time-lag, this is explained by a market model being in operation, where a critical mass of residents is necessary for business. On some developments, this critical mass appeared elusive, despite a clear need, and more has to be done to facilitate social enterprise as an important source of goods and services, particularly in the early phases of developments.

- Community development clearly has a role to play in helping people to feel less isolated. Residents felt there was a lack of social and community infrastructure to meet their needs. It was either not factored into plans or, where it was provided, was generally completed several years after the first residents had moved in.

Planning and delivering affordable housing

- There was a gap between what was stated in the original master plans and section 106 agreements, and what was actually implemented. Social and community facilities identified in section 106 agreements were not necessarily delivered, although due to increases in local authority targets the proportion of affordable housing delivered was higher than stated in original documents. Affordable housing tends to be provided later in new developments, and design standards and quality on later stages were not always as high.
- There was an assumption of a bi-tenure system in planning documents – owner occupation and affordable/social rented housing. The private rented sector tends to be ignored in the planning and governance of new developments, despite private renters being present in all three study areas, significantly so in GRUV.
- Despite a commitment to mixed-tenure developments, residents and developers agreed that more desirable properties were often reserved for owner-occupiers.

While for many residents their new housing in the Thames Gateway has improved their housing situation, it is disappointing that many factors highlighted in the introduction of this report continue to be a problem.

The three case studies investigated in this research began the planning process in the late 1990s, and there have been changes to planning guidance and affordable housing targets since then. In research interviews, planners, developers and local authorities have acknowledged that they have learnt from these case study developments, especially around issues such as health and community facilities and timing of development.

These lessons are equally applicable to other new developments, and time must be taken at the planning and set-up stage to ensure that plans take these into account and deliver accordingly. Given the current economic climate, it is important that stakeholders – planners, developers, local authorities, residents and Government – work together to implement these recommendations and ensure that the new housing commitments are delivered effectively.

Recommendations

- Where possible, a single management system with clear lines of contact and services to residents should be considered to avoid problems identified in the research.
- New developments should ensure that residents have access to adequate infrastructure, such as transport and health facilities from the outset, particularly in areas where the infrastructure was limited prior to development.
- A more systematic approach to gathering existing and future residents' views needs to be undertaken as an important resource for planning.
- A community development plan should be drawn up to coincide with residents moving into a new housing development. This would set out a strategy and implementation plan for community development that would identify ways of creating effective and representative systems of housing governance, including a role for private renters. The plan should also evaluate the potential for harnessing social enterprise as a source of community provision, including running local shops and cafes.
- Social and community enterprise could also play a key role where local facilities and services cannot be provided until a critical mass of residents have moved in. This should be factored into plans and communicated to residents.
- Enforcement measures should be implemented to ensure that section 106 agreements are adhered to between local authorities, planners and developers, to ensure that the infrastructure of a new development is adequate for residents.
- The issue of the breakdown of service charges and who pays for them needs to be resolved, along with the responsibility for maintenance. A subsidy for the maintenance of public space, as opposed to a cap on service charges, might be a more effective way forward.
- RSLs, local authorities, management companies and developers should work together to develop a more systematic and cross-tenure approach to identifying and addressing the support needs of residents.
- Large scale buy to let or private renting in a mixed development can create a number of issues in respect of management and maintenance, social cohesion, and resident advocacy. Developers and planners need to consider these issues and factor this tenure into management structures and processes from the outset.

Appendix

In order to recruit a sample of residents to attend our participant awareness events we undertook an intensive recruitment campaign. In the week prior to events being held in each case study area, up to six recruiters went out and spoke to people on their doorsteps. Recruiters were employed on the basis of having some social work experience (in its broadest sense) to ensure that they would have the skills to engage more ‘hard to reach’ groups and collect data about housing and support needs.

We had a target of 30 residents that we wanted to attract to our participant awareness events in each case study area. We produced a map of the area to ensure that we targeted the whole development and each evening a different part of the scheme was the focus of attention. Where people were out, a note was made of this and then further attempts were made to contact them. The recruiters had a target of collecting details from at least 100 households who agreed to attend the meeting, as we felt that this should yield at least 30 participants.

Each of the households who agreed to attend the meeting completed a short questionnaire with one of our recruiters. This enabled us to identify their characteristics, such as age, ethnicity, housing

tenure type, along with whether they felt they had housing or support needs and contact details. The final question was open-ended and recruiters were given a prompt card where they asked residents about their views on their homes; their immediate and wider neighbourhoods; and whether they felt people got along. They were then given a flyer that contained more specific details about the event. It was explained to potential participants that there was an incentive voucher of £10 for them if they attended an event. On the evening prior to the event, all residents were contacted either by telephone, email, or hand-delivered letter to remind them of the event and to confirm their attendance. The research team also asked local residents associations to promote our events to encourage people to attend.

Source of contacts per development

	Number of completed doorstep interviews	Number attending participatory events	Number participating in event at mother and toddler groups	Number recruited through residents' associations
GURV (1850 properties)	91	20	25	6
GMV (900 properties)	81	20	10	13
Ingress Park (950 properties)	50 in-depth interviews, including three detailed case studies			

Despite the efforts to recruit a sample through non-traditional means and the £10 incentive voucher for participants, this did not generate sufficient participants, particularly in Ingress Park, and therefore other research methods had to be adopted. This included involving local residents' associations in recruitment and holding a separate session at the local mother and toddler groups. Nevertheless it is clear that we were able to involve some residents who had not participated in discussions about their neighbourhood previously.

The researcher's intention was to include in our sample, a cross-section of tenure groups, ethnic groups, age groups, income groups and households, including someone with a disability. This aim was successfully achieved. At Ingress Park there was a pre-dominance of owner-occupiers and the ethnic make-up of the area was less diverse and therefore this was reflected in our sample.

At the participant appraisal events, residents were engaged in a number of activities including:

- walkabouts – residents led researchers around the locality
- photography and captioning of key places – residents selected areas to be photographed and explained the reasons behind their choices

- annotating enlarged maps of the area working in pairs or small groups, residents marked and wrote on enlarged maps of their area to illustrate in geographical terms some of the issues that are important to them
- taped discussions – the most straightforward element of the meeting, a facilitated discussion focusing on the main issues as prioritised by the residents.

Further:

- the photography taken and led by the residents during and after the fieldwork has been used on this report and on other publications relating to the research. The photographs will also be used at an event to launch this research and generate a wider debate on the issues the report raises.
- Participants will have the opportunity to receive a copy of this report, and it will be distributed within the areas researched, as well as to a wider audience.

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