**A Balanced and Integrated Community in Woodberry Down: WDCO’s View**

1. **First Principles**

The principles which the regeneration of Woodberry Down should follow have been spelt out. Hackney Council’s “WOODBERRY DOWN REGENERATION: A Framework for Regeneration” in 2009 promised, “ a large, inclusive, sustainable community which is based on both respect for cultural, social and economic diversity and the recognition of common values and where individuals acknowledge their responsibilities to the wider community.”

This vision was reinforced in the Council’s housing strategy of 2010-15. This noted, ”Housing can play a leading role in the development of cohesive mixed communities. We will ensure that, wherever possible, new housing developments are tenure blind”, and looked forward to “the development of strong, cohesive local communities.”

When it came to the first Woodberry Down masterplan there was more reassurance, with the promise of “a fully integrated place” and “New social rented homes will be mixed with private homes and intermediate homes”.

Finally, there is there are the seven principles to which all partners in the Masterplan Review signed up and which includes: “An integrated and balanced community.”

1. **The Second Tower Debate**

For some time now, WDCO has raised questions about whether the current regeneration is totally meeting our ambitions and those just quoted. These issues came to light in early 2012 when Berkeley Homes proposed a second tower which had not been provided for in the first master plan (to become Skyline). At the time, in a statement to partners, WDCO pointed out some disappointments of the regeneration as it had then progressed. These ranged from the non-delivery in an early phase of the regeneration of a business and training centre, to the scaling down of plans for a new community centre and youth centre, to the postponement of the demolition of the “seven blocks”, some of the worst on the estate.

There also appeared to be significant dents in the “you won’t be able to tell the difference” promise. For example, along the reservoir private ownership was over-represented when it came to the best views and dwellings adjacent to water, while the area which has the least attractive views - the blocks then being built on Sherwood and Horston – hosted exclusively social housing. The hopes of mixed housing cited above were also unrealised.

The expression of these concerns led to negotiations between WDCO and BH on the building of a second tower. The result was the Memorandum of Agreement of February 2012. This included: “The review will be further charged with sign-posting the delivery of an integrated, balanced community, with a proportionate sharing of best views, locations and immediate surroundings between all sections of that community.”

It is important to note that the above sentence presented the greatest difficulties in WDCO’s negotiations with BH. However, in the end BH agreed on both the insertion of “integrated” into “a balanced community” and the proportionate views clause. . WDCO then agreed not to oppose planning permission for the second tower. The fact that we abstained illustrates that some worries persisted.

1. **The Masterplan Review**

The review of the masterplan helped to allay many of our concerns. We insisted from the start that this review was not just about building housing, but was concerned with regenerating our community as whole. We carefully examined – and amended – plans to ensure there would be a proportionate sharing of good and bad view between all tenures. We directed discussions towards community facilities. We proposed detailed discussions on a retail strategy, amending its proposed concentration on the more expensive end of the market. We proposed discussions on an arts strategy and when this was produced partners agreed to amend it so it would reflect the WD heritage. When it was proposed that at least one new exclusively private development (Block D,) would have a private gym we convinced partners of the foolishness of this and it was dropped. In brief, although we had not come across it at the time the following sums up what we wanted to promote:

“ ‘Mixed communities’ as a general social good, reflecting an integrated and egalitarian society in which people of all social classes and incomes share the same space, services and facilities, creating conditions in which mutual understanding and/or shared norms can potentially develop.” (Mi*xed Communities, Evidence Review*, Dr Rebecca Tunstall and Dr Ruth Lupton, London School of Economics. November 2010, Department for Communities and Local Government).

1. **Post Review**

Since the review, we have made progress on a number of issues. We would highlight the arrival of the low cost gym and the design for phase 3 where private social ownership and social housing is much more integrated in the past and where there is a common shared recreational space. We are also pleased that Ways into the Work now has a presence on the estate and that a training and business element is promised in the Pewsham site. However there are also some warning signs and setbacks. These include:

* **The growing demarcation between affordable and other tenures.**

The private gyms and swimming pool in the two towers began this process. It is also indicated in that the private homes have their own concierge service (while too many social homes have communal doors which have been forever breaking down) and their own security patrol (while Genesis can no longer afford this for their homes). Increasingly, the private homes have superior courtyards and other open space: thus Rivulet Gardens has an elegantly designed walkthrough with water features and expensive ornamental features. Rowen and Hornbeam apartments, on the other hand, have a largely concrete courtyard. And, while the newest private blocks have sliding balcony doors, too many social homes have had balcony doors which have proved not fit for purpose. More long-standing, the private homes have their own covered and secure parking spaces, while social homes tenants have to park in the streets.

* **Separate pathways**

The courtyard in Rivulet Gardens has a private pathway between a road and the East Reservoir, as had another private block further down they are blocked off at both ends by locked gates. Thirty yards on there is another pathway, available for the rest of us – them and us. Compare this with private homes that have recently been built between Green Lanes and West Reservoir and which are not part of the regeneration. Here there is a courtyard and walkway to New River, from Green Lanes, open to for all. The value of such an inclusive approach was stated in 2006 by Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the Chartered Institute of Housing, (*Creating and sustaining mixed income communities: A good practice guide*):

“Social mixing cannot be determined by physical means within the context of a residential development. It can however, be facilitated. The sharing of streets, cycleways and footpaths provides situations where near neighbours can, almost literally, ‘bump into each other.”

* **Retail strategy**

A culture has developed where shops and facilities commonly present in working class areas are barred from Woodberry Down, for instance take-aways, bookmakers, pound shops, charity shops. The retail strategy is now in the sole ownership of BH. Previously, at least WDCO had some say in who would be invited in, for example sitting in the panel to decide who would occupy the first shops to be opened up. Even this limited influence has now gone. A recent academic study of WD, conducted by someone who had worked in the areas says:

“A retail strategy should be devised from the outset, in tune with the wishes and preferences of the community…Affordable retail space should be provided, so that higher rents and charges do not prevent local shopkeepers from relocating to the new commercial units….Local businesses should be properly consulted with, and their needs taken into proper consideration in terms of provision of parking spaces, access and advertisement strategies.” (*Estate Regeneration and Community Impacts Challenges and lessons for social landlords, developers and local council’s* CASE report 99, 2016 Alice Belotti. LSE Housing & Communities March 2016)

While a general report on mixed communities in 2007 said:

“While some of valuable attributes, like good schools, might benefit rich and poor equally, others, perhaps upmarket gastropubs or golf courses, are only useful if you can afford to use them….Moreover, affluent neighbourhoods lack many of the amenities poorer households need. Some of these are tangible, such as shops selling goods one can afford to buy on a low income.” (*Are mixed communities the answer to segregation and poverty?,* Paul Cheshire, JRT, 17th May 2007)

It is true that so far the shops that have come to WD have not rung the alarm bells warned against above, but it is also true that a retail strategy which reflects what those living in the area actually want has also yet to materialise.

* **A new private gym?**

A new private gym for Block D was so self-evidently contrary to an integrated community that it is quickly dropped when it was originally suggested during the masterplan. Now it has re-emerged. But it is blindingly obvious that having separate gyms for the well off and one for the rest of the community is divisive. It goes against all advice on such subjects. Here is just one example from the *A good practice guide* - Published for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation by and Chartered Institute of Housing referred to above:

‘Facilities and resources such as shops, community centres and sports facilities …..are social spaces where near neighbours and friends from different tenures and income bands can develop social ties, and also provide spaces in which different income groups come into contact with each other as part of a mixed use as well as mixed income neighbourhood.’

It surely is obvious: private leisure facilities create barriers, they defy integration, the make a society less cohesive.

* **Creating Jobs**

AS we have said, WDCO welcomes the arrival of Ways into Work into our community, as well as the work MHDT, Genesis and Berkeley Homes have done on employment and training. But there is still much to be done on the employment front. For a start it is surely about time an Employment and Skills Plan and a Woodberry Down Training and Steering Group were developed and established, as called for in the planning conditions attached to the revised masterplan and associated documents. Among other the things, the steering groups was meant to:

* “Develop and implement a holistic employment support offer to local residents
* Develop a programme of activities to help generate local jobs and enterprise growth
* Monitor the delivery of employment and training outputs
* Monitor the socio-economic impact of the regeneration of the local community.”

1. **Conclusion**

A Council ‘Review of Hackney’s Sustainable Community Strategy’ in 2012 noted:

“There are some key strains on community life. These include mistrust between younger and older generations and there is some concern about whether there is always a good understanding between people of different socio-economic backgrounds.”

It is probably the case that, generally speaking, “strains” between those of a different socio-economic background had increased since the above was written. The importance of breaking down barriers is more important than ever. It is a question of avoiding social conflict. But instead of breaking down barriers the trend in Woodberry Down seems to be the other way.

WDCO has made and will continue to make every effort to integrate our new residents into our activities, and have had some success in doing so. We know that social and economic integration is not easy. We know there are important issues such as service charges and viability that need to be tackled. But we also know that the, “You won’t be able to tell the difference” promise to our community given at the start of the regeneration should never be forgotten or diluted.

What concerns us is that social cohesion and integration appear to be relegated in the priorities of some of our partners. Accordingly, as well as requesting that the specific points cited above be addressed we believe a broader look at where we are going is now necessary. In another “Good Practice Guide”, this one produced by the Chartered Institute of Houses and the Housing Corporation in 2007, it is recommended that the following question should be asked for those aspiring to community cohesion in housing. We now suggest it is time they were addressed in Woodberry Down:

“What is the local vision for community cohesion?

What should a cohesive city, town or village look like?

What benefits does cohesion bring to neighbourhoods and to organisations?

What are the risks if no action is taken to maintain or improve cohesion? –

What tensions exist or might arise?

How should each of the key players be involved in developing the strategy and in implementing the subsequent programmes? “

**Woodberry Down Community Organisation, 30 November 2016**