

Principles and Objectives: New Council Homes in Enfield



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Levitt Bernstein



Images:

Front cover and main image p 9: Du-jardin Mews by Maccreehanor Lavington and Karakusevic Carson architects

Main images p 8 and p12: Alma Estate Regeneration by Pollard Thomas Edwards architects

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Introduction

Background

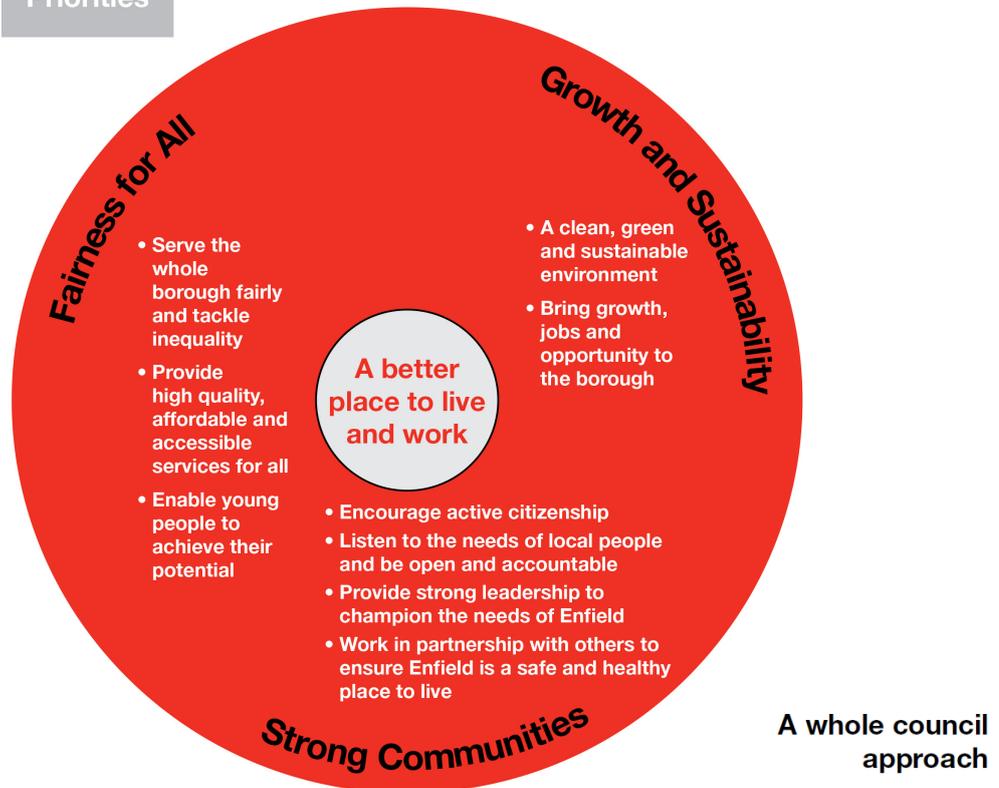
Enfield is once again building new council housing. Working with Enfield Homes, our Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO), we are embarking on an ambitious new development programme that will see empty land used, redundant buildings replaced and run-down estates transformed to provide much needed new housing; primarily affordable housing for rent.



This initiative fits with the three overarching objectives of our current business plan, 'A Fairer Future for All':

- **Fairness for all**
- **Growth and sustainability**
- **Strong communities**

Vision
Aims
Priorities



“Quality matters as much as quantity”

Work has already begun and our aim is to have 10,000 new homes underway by 2019. Quality matters as much as quantity and from the start, we recognised the need to be clear about the high standards we expect the new homes and developments to reach.

This document sets out the key principles that have guided the development of the design and technical performance standards and specifications which stem from it. They will continue to guide us, and the people we work with, as we fulfil our objectives.

Together, they set a new standard for our next generation of council housing.

Guiding principles

At the start of 2014 we brought together a wide range of council staff, from departments such as development, planning, management and maintenance, to agree some key priorities. Supported by external consultants, and with input from Councillors, residents and our development partners, we have undergone a series of collaborative workshops to define what good quality housing means to us, and more importantly, what it means to our residents.

The first step was to define nine overarching principles that relate specifically to our planned development programme.

1. Set a new standard for council housing	2. Provide safe, welcoming and attractive living environments that integrate with their surroundings	3. Offer residents choice and empower them to participate throughout the development process
4. Alleviate fuel poverty and keep general running costs down	5. Create balanced communities and tenure blind development	6. Promote general health and wellbeing through flexible and inclusive design
7. Minimise environmental impact and plan for a changing climate	8. Design and develop durable buildings, spaces and infrastructure and secure best value over a long lifespan	9. Support the local economy

Mindful that principles are only effective when put into practice, we have worked through the implications of delivering these priorities and produced a comprehensive set of design standards and technical specifications. These are set out in a separate document and will be applied to all the new council housing we build. They will act as a brief to the designers we appoint, form the backbone of the agreements we make with our development partners, and represent a promise to residents.

“Together they set a new standard for our next generation of council housing”

Relationship to existing Enfield council policies and other published standards

Enfield Council documents

The new principles, standards and specifications are complementary to our existing standards and policies and sit within the hierarchy of planning and development related policy documents as follows:

- Business Plan
- Core Strategy
- Draft Development Management Document (DMD)
- **Principles and Objectives: New Council Homes in Enfield**
- **Performance Standards and Specifications: New Council Homes in Enfield**
- Wheelchair Design Guidance

A key part of their role is to interpret our existing policies in the specific context of our house-building programme. The standards provide considerably more design and technical detail, particularly in relation to internal layout, fittings and finishes, and deal with issues that are often not covered by other guidance, such as management and maintenance. Where our existing documents, notably the Draft DMD and the Wheelchair Design Guidance, are directly relevant, we have referenced the appropriate policies rather than repeated them.

Other relevant published standards and guidance

We have also taken account of other published standards and guidance, many of which are reflected in the Draft DMD too. These include the London Plan and the GLA Housing Standards (comprising the London Housing SPG 2012, the Interim London Housing Design Guide (LHDG) and the GLA Funding Standards Framework Prospectus and Pro-forma).

The GLA standards also embody the following key standards:

- **Lifetime Homes (LTH)**
- **Code for Sustainable Homes (CSH)**
- **Secured by Design (SBD)**



Cost input

We are clear in our aim to provide good value over the long term. Working with external cost consultants, we have considered the impact of future operational, maintenance and replacement costs alongside the initial, capital cost. This life cycle costing exercise has allowed us to weigh up the relative merits of different options and informed our decision-making.

As the standards are implemented we will seek feedback from our own staff and Enfield Homes (particularly housing managers) as well as our external development partners and consultants. Above all, we will learn from the firsthand experience of our residents.

Keeping the performance standards and specifications up to date

We will also need to keep up to date with changes to our own policies as well as those to external standards and regulation. We are mindful of the implications of the Government's ongoing review of housing standards and appreciate that this is likely to lead to new regulations for accessibility, space, security and water. We are aware that changes to energy performance and carbon compliance are also pending in light of the commitment to achieve Zero Carbon with Allowable Solutions for new homes from 2016.

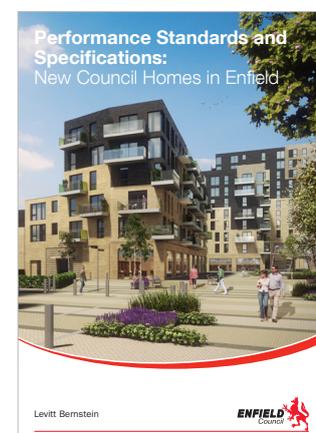
We therefore expect to have to update our performance requirements within the next year and continue to review them periodically.

Each of our nine principles has had direct implications for the design standards and technical specifications we have derived. These are set out under three main headings:

Putting principles into practice

- 1. External environment** - including streets, buildings, public open space, play areas, shared amenity areas car-parking and environmental sustainability.
- 2. Communal areas** - including entrances, corridors, lifts and stairs, post and deliveries, cycle storage and waste management.
- 3. Inside the home** - including the size of dwellings and requirements for all parts of the home as well as privacy, soundproofing, security, daylight, sunlight, ventilation and related issues.

An additional section on services is included in the technical part of the document.



Principle 1

Set a new standard for council housing

“...from form and massing to windows and door handles...”

It is now fifty years since councils were actively involved in housing procurement and while the homes built in the forties, fifties and sixties were badly needed, the majority have required considerable on-going maintenance and many are now at, or near, the end of their useful lives.

Housing standards generally have risen significantly since that time and the value of good urban design, balanced communities and environmental sustainability is more widely appreciated. We want the next generation of council housing in Enfield to foster strong community networks, support family life and promote personal well-being. We expect the new buildings and spaces to last significantly longer than their predecessors; to require less maintenance; and to be adaptable to the changing needs and circumstances of our residents. They need to be more accessible, more resource efficient, more durable and more appealing.

These wide-reaching objectives can only be met by a comprehensive set of standards that collectively set a new benchmark. The first of our principles therefore has implications for the entire design and build process – from initial, strategic decisions about form, massing and layout through to the appropriate specification of components such as windows and door handles.

Below: Alma Estate as it is now and as it could be following redevelopment



Principle 2

Enfield is a large and varied borough with areas of distinct architectural character each with different opportunities and constraints. The best new developments show an understanding of place and context; draw on the positive aspects of what already exists; and improve those parts that could be better.

Successful layouts integrate with their surroundings by providing through routes that connect into the network of existing streets. Good physical connections lead to good social connections – allowing people to travel safely and efficiently to work or school, reach local facilities and access public transport.

All new developments should feel welcoming and inviting – qualities that are achieved through a combination of strategy and detail. Routes need to be overlooked by buildings and kept active by frequent entrances, windows and balconies. This not only makes people feel safer but also promotes neighbourliness and friendship. Car usage and fuel cost are often reduced as a result because people feel secure enough to walk or cycle.

Buildings and spaces can convey a sense of welcome – careful planting, warm materials, large windows and balconies and inviting entrances all make a discernible difference.

Provide safe, welcoming and attractive living environments that integrate with their surroundings

“..good physical connections lead to good social connections”



Below left: Dujardin Mews creates a safe neighbourly streetscape



Principle 3

Offer residents choice and empower them to participate throughout the development process

“...where people have been involved in the design process they are more likely to use the spaces that result”

Residents are often the real experts when it comes to understanding the local area. Early consultation not only builds good community relations, it can also be an extremely useful way of gathering local knowledge and opinion. Local people know what works and what doesn't and have much to contribute throughout the design process. Their views and experiences can help to shape buildings and spaces and this can be a crucial factor in terms of their long-term success. We know that where people have been involved in decision-making, they are more likely to use the spaces that result, and to contribute to their upkeep.

Community consultation is particularly important in estate renewal projects. Faced with major change, residents can feel vulnerable and unsettled about the future. It is important to keep them involved and informed throughout the process and offer genuine choices about their future homes.

We expect to see well planned events that actively engage residents and cover a range of topics and techniques. This could mean an open discussion about the design of an open space or the sort of play equipment that would work best - a workshop to consider the merits of different types of balconies - or one-to-one sessions with individual residents to ascertain their preferences for the colours of walls, doors and flooring and the style of kitchen units.

Good design continues to offer people choices about how they wish to live, long after they have moved in. For example, we hope to give all residents the ability to have a separate kitchen if that is their preference. The rooms in their new homes will be large enough to be furnished in different ways and used for a wide range of activities. Living spaces will be suitable for socialising or quiet relaxation and bedrooms designed for play and study as well as for sleeping and personal storage.

Through the incorporation of Lifetime Homes features, we will be able to adapt homes more easily for our residents as their physical needs change over time.

Below: engaged residents contribute ideas and opinions through consultation



Principle 4

Rising fuel costs are a very real concern for many of our residents. Good design and specification can create highly energy efficient buildings simply by providing a well-insulated external envelope. This can generate huge fuel savings for relatively little extra capital cost - a very tangible example of another of our principals - the desire to achieve long-term value for money. The installation of smart meters and appropriate Low or Zero Carbon (LZC) technologies will make a further contribution, as will the stringent water efficiency targets of our DMD.

Alleviate fuel poverty and keep general running costs down

Having made our new homes as energy efficient as possible, it may still be necessary to 'offset' carbon through 'Allowable Solutions'. We will follow Government guidelines for offsetting additional carbon by using levied funds to improve the thermal performance of existing housing stock in the borough - thereby spreading the benefit more widely.

It is equally important to keep service charges reasonable, particularly for tenants of affordable housing. A large element of service charge relates directly to the cost of management and maintenance. Durability, the subject of our eighth principle, is paramount to keeping on-going costs down. Notwithstanding our responsibilities as landlords, it is in everyone's interest for us to procure buildings and spaces that 'look after themselves' as far possible. Ensuring that residents are able to clean their own windows safely and easily is a simple example of how we can reduce costs to tenants and leaseholders by inviting them to take on responsibility where they can.

"..good design and specification can create highly energy efficient buildings"

A more fundamental way in which we can reduce service charges is to balance the number of households served by each core. By aiming to provide clusters of 15 to 25 dwellings, we will have enough households to share the cost of maintaining a lift while remaining within a workable number from a management perspective. Larger numbers may appear more efficient but gains can be easily outweighed by the need for increased levels of management and maintenance, particularly where child density is high.

Below: examples of smart metering, photovoltaic roof tiles and retro-fitting cavity wall insulation



Principle 5

Create balanced communities and tenure blind development

“...socially and economically balanced communities...”

Below: mixed tenure developments designed to encourage social cohesion



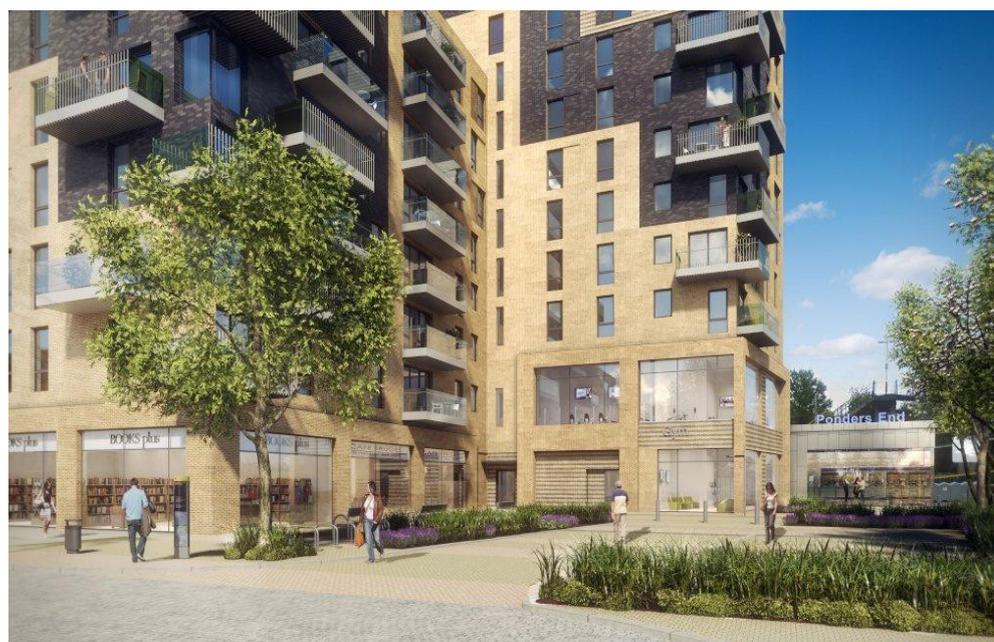
Although our highest priority is the provision of new homes for affordable and social rent, we will also be building homes for shared ownership and, in some instances, private rent. On larger sites we may wish to provide an element of housing for market sale, and in these cases, we will select a development partner to work alongside us. The majority of our new developments will therefore be mixed tenure – a key part of creating a socially and economically balanced community.

Across all of our developments, we will ensure that different tenures are dispersed across the site, well integrated and designed to similarly high standards. While we are not looking for total uniformity of design or specification, we do want to ensure that the tenure of a building, or core, is not obvious from its external appearance.

This tenure blind approach to external design is important to us in terms of fairness and will also provide the flexibility for tenure to change over time. The continuing demand for shared ownership and the 80 -100 year life that we should expect from the homes we build today makes it increasingly likely that the tenure of a home, or group of homes, will change over time. If we choose to develop for the private rental market we will ensure that the design and layout of the building and the flats within it would not prevent us from switching to affordable rent at a future date.

It is useful that the London Plan requires the GLA internal space standards to be universally applied. In itself, this promotes equality and flexibility but we have chosen to go further by adopting the additional ‘good practice standards’ for all tenures.

Almost all of our own design standards and technical specifications are also consistent and where they differ this is largely due to the need to keep service charges as low as possible for our own tenants. Where external areas are shared by different tenures, we will be applying the higher, or highest, specification.



Principle 6

Creating living environments that promote general health and wellbeing can be particularly challenging in dense, urban environments. Where there is limited scope to provide private gardens, balconies and wintergardens are a valuable substitute. These should be coupled with well-designed public and shared amenity spaces that allow for active play and exercise as well as opportunities for quiet relaxation. Trees, and other forms of planting, are important for their softening effect and can also provide summer shade, act as a filter for airborne pollutants, absorb carbon dioxide and support native birds and other forms of wildlife.

We want communal areas to be naturally lit and ventilated wherever possible and anonymous, institutional layouts with long, internal corridors to be avoided. Smaller clusters of flats are more manageable and allow people to get to know neighbours more easily.

Within the home, health and wellbeing derive from environmental conditions that are stable and comfortable, and spaces that are enjoyable and fit for purpose. The former requires good levels of daylight, ventilation, soundproofing and privacy, and the latter implies a balance of social spaces - where families can choose to eat and sit together, and private spaces - where individuals can choose to study, play or relax alone.

Good housing often has an even greater impact on the quality of life of older and disabled residents. Accessible and adaptable homes with level access showers and the potential for the fitting of stair-lifts and handrails, support independence and reduce the risk of falls and accidents. They can also generate substantial savings in the costs of health and social care, particularly when the ability to install assistive technology has been considered from the start.

We expect our homes to accommodate religious and cultural diversity too – for example, by providing flexible living, dining and kitchen arrangements, additional bathrooms or washing facilities and receivers for international television channels.

Promote general health and wellbeing through flexible and inclusive design

“..substantial savings in the cost of health and social care....”

Below: indoor environments that cater for diversity and promote health living



Principle 7

Minimise environmental impact and plan for a changing climate

It is now widely accepted that our climate is changing. We have to expect longer, drier summers and milder, wetter winters interspersed with more extreme weather events such as gales and heavy rainfall. We expect our new homes to be designed and developed with this in mind. They need to be robust enough to withstand inclement weather while staying comfortable during warmer months. Solar gain should be captured as a benefit (to warm spaces and provide low carbon energy) as opposed to being a problem (by triggering demand for mechanical cooling). We will also expect suitable mechanisms for reducing flood risk such as sustainable urban drainage systems (SUDS).

At all stages, the design, construction and use of our new homes should consider the environment. The general population increase, coupled with higher lifestyle expectations, has meant that resources and construction materials are becoming less abundant and therefore more costly. We will promote the principles of resource efficiency; namely to procure sustainable materials and use them wisely to reduce waste.

“Lean, Clean and Green”

Our homes will be designed and built to operate effectively and efficiently, necessitating only minimal resources (principally energy and water) to ensure comfort now and in the future. We will follow the GLA and DMD energy hierarchy by being ‘Lean, Clean and Green’. The starting point is to reduce demand through good design and robust specification. Once we have pushed the fabric and services as far as is practical, we will encourage the use of Low and Zero Carbon (LZC) technologies as the final step in creating energy efficient homes.

We will also consider the wider external environment and use planting and other measures to increase ecological value and mitigate CO2 emissions. Similarly, we will be proactive in seeking to reduce car dependency by promoting all forms of green travel including cycling, the use of public transport and car clubs, and by providing charging points for electric cars.

Below: examples of some of the many ways we can reduce carbon emissions



Principle 8

Durable buildings offer a range of benefits, from reducing the need for maintenance, repair or replacement, through to retaining their aesthetic qualities.

We will expect our homes and associated spaces (including the infrastructure which serves them) to be robust and long lasting. We encourage the use of life cycle cost analysis to evaluate the benefits of the different options available. We recognise that it may be prudent to invest more into the capital costs of our homes if it means that operational costs are lower and life expectancy is increased.

We will resist cheaper, less durable materials especially if they are likely to need more frequent repair or replacement. Moreover, we will encourage the use of products and materials that can be reused or recycled at the end of the building's lifetime. And we will consider modern methods of construction (such as offsite manufacture) where this will improve quality, reduce waste and speed up construction.

Future-proofing is another facet of durability. It will be important to consider resource security and scarcity when selecting products as it is counterproductive to specify materials or components which may be difficult and/or expensive to obtain in the future. When designing buildings, infrastructure and services installations we will consider accessibility for cleaning and maintenance. Further, when addressing external spaces, we will consider the impact of features such as trees and planting on maintenance requirements. Careful thought will be needed when selecting species and excellent soil preparation and early maintenance will help to encourage naturally healthy growth.

Our aim is to provide living environments that are comfortable and which make low demands on our residents, and on maintenance personnel, over a long life. The use of durable products and materials will build on the benefits achieved through energy and water saving by ensuring that efficiencies are not eroded over time.

Design and develop durable buildings, spaces and infrastructure and secure best value over a long lifespan

“..comfortable living environments that make low demands on our residents...”

Below: simple, hard wearing materials that will stand the test of time



Principle 9

Support the local economy

Supporting the local economy is central to our business plan. Aided by high speed broadband, we want our new schemes to help the Enfield business community through the patronage of local tradespeople and suppliers. We will therefore encourage the use of local supply chains including 'Small to Medium Enterprises' (SMEs) and 'Voluntary Community Organisations' (VCOs) to provide construction materials and resources, and seek to secure training opportunities and apprenticeships for young people in the borough.

While we recognise that small businesses may find it difficult to compete with large national companies in terms of price alone, they can offer a number of other benefits that potentially add value. Local suppliers are often able to provide a more personal service and may be more willing to tailor their service or their product to a particular set of circumstances. Companies based here in Enfield can often offer shorter or more convenient delivery times - probably reducing carbon emissions as a result. Their ability to develop a wide range of contacts through formal and informal networking with other local businesses can be invaluable - particularly when smaller quantities of materials, parts, or skilled labour, are needed at short notice.

"...a desire to see the community and its economy prosper..."

Where bespoke design or fabrication is required, especially when this arises through community consultation or participation, local crafts people are often the most competitive in terms of price and delivery and have a better understanding of what would work well in the local context. The knowledge and satisfaction that local skills have been employed to produce a significant item often increases the sense of pride and long-term ownership felt by residents too.

Looking ahead beyond the construction phase, the ability to source replacement parts or products locally and get equipment serviced at short notice is also advantageous and assists with speedy repair and maintenance. And like us, local supply chains have a vested interest in the future of Enfield and a desire to see the community and its economy prosper.

Below: new development brings direct and indirect benefits to the local economy





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