Social Regeneration: Embedding estate regeneration into broader strategies for improving social infrastructure
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SOCIAL REGENERATION:
Embedding estate regeneration into broader strategies for improving social infrastructure

This Case Study focuses an estate regeneration scheme and the broader social infrastructure projects surrounding the project. It was developed as part of two year-long placements at London Borough of Enfield between October 2019 – September 2020. The Case Study may be useful for other Authorities delivering estate regeneration projects seeking to embed the benefits more widely throughout the community.

CONTEXT
Joyce Avenue and Snell's Park (Joyce and Snell's) is a council estate in Enfield, located in Angel Edmonton in the south of the borough. Built between the late 1950s and early 1970s, the estate comprises nearly eight-hundred homes. Enfield Council has been exploring redevelopment options since 2015 with a view to building better homes and public space for the current residents and increasing the overall number of homes. Engagement conducted in 2018 introduced the various options the Council was considering – full demolition, infill, refurbishment – with residents favouring full demolition and rebuild. In 2020, comprehensive engagement began, in the lead-up to a residential ballot (scheduled for September 2021) where residents will vote on the future of their homes and neighbourhood. The ballot was introduced by the Mayor of London Sadiq Khan in 2018 as a condition for all estate regeneration schemes that require GLA funding – therefore ensuring that residents are at the heart of the process.¹

For the first time in a generation, the Council is taking a lead role in housing delivery, acting as master developer. Joyce and Snell’s is the borough’s flagship estate regeneration scheme because it represents a new model for the Council and its approach to estate regeneration. The Council is delivering the development in-house and is committed to doubling the number of homes available at council rent. All current residents will be offered a new home on the estate and the new additional homes will be made available for rent rather than sale. The regeneration is also proposing better public realm and new social infrastructure which responds to the broader needs and aspirations of residents and the wider Angel Edmonton community.

¹ GLA, Estate Regeneration (2018)
KEY CHALLENGES
The team identified a series of challenges that form the context of the Joyce and Snell’s regeneration project:

1. Poor quality existing environment
   The Joyce and Snell’s estates feature a mixture of accommodation and building typologies. The original masterplan was not delivered as intended and the design, location and spacing of the blocks were influenced by the existing street layout and other logistical issues. In addition, some of the later infill development has been less successful in terms of design and layout. As a result, the existing street plan is unsatisfactory and there are significant problems with parking, anti-social behaviour and crime. The layout of the existing estate has many unseen areas and the apartment blocks have little or no security on stairwells.

2. Limited in-house experience of direct-delivery
   One of the key challenges that boroughs like Enfield face is a shortage of skilled staff, particularly development managers and resident engagement specialists. Although the Council is helping to address this skills shortage with training on both topics, the borough continues to rely on consultants.

3. Poor quality social infrastructure
   Angel Edmonton features amongst the 10% most deprived areas for several of the English Indices of Deprivation. This part of the borough is one of the most acutely affected by
crime, barriers to education, skills, training and employment. Income deprivation and a poor living environment are affecting the local community, particularly those living in Angel Edmonton.

4. Two timescales  
At Joyce and Snell’s we are dealing with two distinct, yet interrelated timescales for youth engagement. In the long-term, the regeneration of Joyce and Snell’s is a fifteen-year project. How are we going to ensure that the estate of 2035 is one that the young residents of 2020 want to call home? In the short-term, how can we facilitate changes and improvements in the estate which speaks to the experiences of young people and allows them to grow as individuals and members of the community?

5. COVID-19  
The pandemic brought about significant and particular problems to the regeneration project. The need to eliminate unnecessary social contact triggered a transformation of the engagement strategy and programme, with a greater reliance on non-contact and digital methods. The ballot was delayed as officers felt the inability to meet residents face-to-face hampered the inclusivity of the engagement. There was also concern that engaging in the first place was not the right idea as residents might be struggling with financial and health problems brought on by the pandemic. But equally, this delay generated uncertainty and a sense of unease, particularly amongst members of the community who feared that the regeneration might not take place at all.
ACTIONS
In the lead-up to the ballot, the project team have been working to address these challenges through a holistic strategy that sought to balance short and long-term change and avoided seeing the estate regeneration project in isolation – embedding it into the broader vision for improvements in the area.

1. Improving life for residents before redevelopment
   — If there is a positive outcome following the resident’s ballot, then the Council will undertake a comprehensive redevelopment of the estate. This process, which will take approximately 15 years to be completed, will have a tremendous impact on the lives of existing residents. Some of them will not even live to see the project finished. It was therefore important for the council that immediate improvements to improve the quality of life of residents could be implemented before both the ballot and possible construction.

   — Part of our role is to look out for possible opportunities and partnerships that might have a positive impact on the community. Since the beginning of our assignment we have collaborated with other Council workers such as neighbourhood officers, caretakers, community services managers, maintenance and repairs teams, and community safety officers amongst others. For example, in our first week at the council we undertook an environmental visual audit to identify issues that were causing nuisance to the residents of the estate and to support the work carried out by the Repairs and Maintenance team and the Environmental Services unit. This has evolved into regular walkabouts around the estate that result in a list of actions for different teams to undertake in order to improve the maintenance of the estate.

2. Planning for social infrastructure provision
   — The Joyce and Snell’s regeneration provides a once in a generation opportunity to address engrained social issues, improve quality of life and access to opportunities. A coherent approach to regeneration is therefore necessary to understand and tackle the underlying social and economic issues linked to poor quality social infrastructure. Key to this are the less visible aspects of social life and types of support that create opportunities to meet other residents, build local networks and shared social experiences.

   — First, we set up a working group with other officers working in the area to start mapping and analysing the existing social
infrastructure in Angel Edmonton – in particular those places of encounter that foster social interaction – not only the nearby community centre and the library, but also the shops and businesses on the high street and the overall public realm. Through a series of interviews with key users and management staff, we have collected information relative to the type of services provided, who the regular users are, utilisation rates, and how accessible and inclusive each facility is.

— In parallel to this, we have linked-up with our colleagues working on Town Centres to integrate the planning of social infrastructure with the Good Growth Fund initiative for the nearby high street at Fore Street, which is providing the foundation for regeneration of the area. The idea presented in the diagram below is that the small physical placemaking interventions proposed for the area will inform the permanent future scheme proposed for Joyce and Snell’s.

— The current library will first be transformed into an urban room to facilitate community engagement and build capacity, and later down the road a civic hub and public square will be built to become the heart of the community. The garage site and disused laundry yard adjoining Fore Street, which is notorious for anti-social behaviour and crime, will then be replaced by workspace and studio space for local businesses. This project is understood as an incubator space to promote and support innovative business and to build their capacity to move into a permanent commercial space delivered as part of the regeneration of Joyce & Snell’s.

— The public realm will see a similar evolution. From street improvements like street art, innovative lighting interventions and striking signage along blank walls to the new public realm that the regeneration of Joyce & Snell’s is planning to deliver.

3. Engaging residents
— Initial engagement with residents of Joyce and Snell’s commenced in 2018 upon the appointment of the masterplan architects. It was not until January 2020 however that the Council had a full-time engagement team appointed and therefore a presence on the estate. A two-week public exhibition at Boundary Hall – the estate’s main community space – initiated the programme, coinciding with the release of the first digital polls, administered via the GiveMyView platform. Over two weeks, a number of design workshops were also held, providing the conditions for more intimate, focused dialogue between residents and the architects.
Visualisation of the Urban Room designed by Jan Kattein Architects for Fore Street, LB Enfield.

Previous spread: Diagram showing the relationship between small, physical placemaking interventions and the longer-term regeneration plans for Joyce and Snell's estate.
— Following the exhibition, a pop-up trailer was organised throughout February, followed in March by the opening of a refurbished Boundary Hall and the introduction of coffee mornings and women-only sessions. Less than a week later the country was put into a national lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic and all in-person engagement was halted.

— In the first two months of lockdown, no engagement took place about the proposed regeneration. Instead, the Engagement team supported Joyce and Snell’s residents through the crisis by calling regularly, arranging food parcels and medical supplies. The purpose and potential of engagement transformed during those months as we stopped talking with residents about regeneration and development, and instead about daily routines and the best things to watch on the telly.

— Regeneration engagement resumed in June with the launch of a new website, a virtual exhibition, additional polls and a series of ‘live chat’ sessions. To support residents facing barriers to accessing and using digital channels, engagement materials were printed and posted to every household on the estate.

4. Involving young people
— In the past year, we were participants in the GLA’s Social Integration Lab – a pilot scheme introduced to acquaint local authorities with the practicalities of embedding social integration principles in regeneration schemes. The Joyce and Snell’s project team worked closely with the GLA’s regeneration team and design consultancy Snook to design and deliver a programme of activities for the estate’s young residents. Delivered in collaboration with the Council’s Youth Services, ‘Mad, Sad, Glad’ used photography and filmmaking as tools for young people to document and communicate their experiences of living on the estate. The programme allowed the Estate Renewal team to build relationships with young residents as well as local schools. Work produced by the young participants will be showcased to the wider community with an exhibition and film screening.

— Beyond the production of images and films, and the opportunity for young residents to reflect and communicate, the ‘Mad, Sad and Glad’ project has allowed Joyce and Snell’s team to establish a relationship with a group of young residents. This will be fundamental to the success of a youth panel that will be set-up to amplify the voices of young people throughout the regeneration lifecycle. The panel will act as a mechanism for involving young people in the design process, whilst also facilitating and delivering youth-led projects which positively influence the estate and wider neighbourhood.
KEY LEARNINGS

— Engage colleagues
If your role requires you to engage with local communities, develop your confidence for conversation with colleagues in the office. Whether they are in your own team or not, striking up a dialogue with fellow officers can be helpful for learning more about the Council and the local area, as well as building relations which will support you as you navigate the organisation in the months to come. Working with local communities as a team means you need to be comfortable and familiar with each other. Find where interests converge, create alternative channels of communication that aren’t just emails and meetings, and put the work in to make those relationships flourish.

— Be the consultant
The prevalence of consultants in and around council-led projects is well-known. In most cases these consultants are fundamental in shaping the project and ensuring its deliverability. Often this is down to the mindset and approach that they bring to the table; capabilities shaped by time spent in smaller, leaner and more agile organisations. It is possible to learn from the approach taken by consultants and implement this in-house as a council officer. Embracing slowness, move away from plotting outcomes and towards asking questions — it might take longer, there might be more uncertainty, but it can lead to more desirable and enjoyable outcomes.

— Test alternative ideas
Don’t be afraid of suggesting new or different ideas and actions to dealing with issues and problems (e.g. persistent anti-social behaviour on a council estate) or even to changing existing processes and procedures. Sometimes the solution to a problem comes from testing or exploring many possible solutions, as unexpected connections can be drawn. Whether or not it works out, the lessons learnt will increase the chances of success in future initiatives and projects.

— Practice empathy
A healthy exchange of different ideas is always positive. Practice empathy - assume that the other person’s point of view is as valid for them as yours is valid for you. Be curious – ask questions to be able to see the world from their perspective and practice active listening. This is very important when engaging with local communities. When someone has stated their point of view take the time to summarize your understanding of this to them. This helps them to know that you are trying to understand them.
NEXT STEPS
This Practice Note has explored a number of challenges and actions in estate regeneration: from improving the lives of residents before and after redevelopment through the provision of social infrastructure, to our experience building relationships with the residents of the estate. To take these initial thoughts further, there are a number of areas of research that would benefit from further development. These include:

— One possible continuation of this work would be to analyse how the new Urban Room that is about to be developed as part of the Good Growth Fund (or an existing Urban Room in a different council estate) is used by the residents of the estate and, as another piece of social infrastructure, what role it will play in shaping the regeneration process.

— Research to investigate the impact of youth panels in amplifying the voices of young people throughout the regeneration lifecycle and whether they have the capacity to act as a mechanism for involving young people in the design process and facilitating and delivering youth-led projects.
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Many local authorities are now taking a lead role in estate regeneration, often directly delivering housing for the first time in decades. Ambitious councils are building more than just new homes, prioritising place-based strategies, working with residents and the local community to envision and deliver better public realm and social infrastructure, alongside innovative, needs-based housing mixes and typologies. In-house engagement officers are designing and facilitating inclusive, genuine engagement processes to ensure the needs and aspirations of residents are met.

This case study was produced as part of year-long placements at London Borough of Enfield focused on the council’s flagship estate regeneration of Joyce and Snell’s, in Angel Edmonton. Led in-house, with a focus on doubling the number of homes at council rent, the scheme marks a new model for the local authority. The case study was published in April 2021 and reflects on community engagement, place-based development strategies and social infrastructure.

#CommunityEngagement #Council-ledHousing
#ResidentBallots #SocialInfrastructure

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